FAITH AND CRITICISM

IN POST-DISRUPTION SCOTLAND,

WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO

A. B. DAVIDSON, WILLIAM ROBERTSON SMITH,

AND GEORGE ADAM SMITH

by

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon sometimes known as believing criticism was the attempt in the last half of the nineteenth century to marry evangelical orthodoxy with modern methods of biblical criticism. Those methods had long been considered inimical to faith, usually because of their association with either theological liberalism or plain unbelief.

Within the Free Church of Scotland three Old Testament scholars stand out as believing critics: George Adam Smith, William Robertson Smith, and A. B. Davidson. All three were charged with denying the inspiration and authority of the Bible, although only William Robertson Smith was actually tried for heresy. The relationship between their faith and their criticism is the subject of this study.

Chapter I is an analysis of the case and views of George Adam Smith, the last of those impeached. Chapter II is a retrospective survey of the views of faith and the Bible dominant in the Free Church in the middle of the century, against which those of the believing critics were a reaction. Chapter III takes up William Robertson Smith, the most famous of the three, and Chapter IV A. B. Davidson, who taught the other two. Chapter V is an attempt to deal with the question, why it was the orthodox and evangelical Free Church which produced the most able, but also the most critical, of Scotland's biblical scholars.

The main arguments of the thesis are that the battle for the Bible in Scotland in the nineteenth-century had, fundamentally, more to do with the meaning of faith than with matters of criticism, and that modern views, both of the Bible and of belief, may have been implicit in traditional views; that is, the old, in some ways, may have helped to create the new.

TO

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The heresy trial of William Robertson Smith has so much become the symbol of the confrontation in Scotland between traditional and modern approaches to the Bible that the fact that there were any others is hardly known. It is justifiably so. With the removal of Smith from his Chair in 1881 the struggle was largely over. The cases of Marcus Dods and A. B. Bruce nine years later were nothing in comparison with the cause célèbre of Smith and the impeachment of George Adam Smith in 1902 for holding opinions subversive of the inspiration of Holy Scripture proved to be the last of its kind in the Free and (after the Union of 1900) United Free Church. Indeed the size of the majority to dismiss the charges against George Adam Smith, and the ease with which his theologically imprecise defence was accepted indicate that by the turn of the century the climate of opinion with regard to higher criticism in Scotland had changed dramatically in the twenty short years since William Robertson Smith's deposition, even more dramatically in the sixty years since the events of 1843.

Something of the magnitude of the change as well as the reasons for it are reflected in the Robertson Smith case itself. The trial was the centre-piece and climax of what one church historian has called "an activity of thought, study and speculation never before known in the religious history of Scotland."[1] In terms of specific issues it traced the outlines of the theological and spiritual unrest through which not only the Free Church but Christendom at large was then passing. It began a mere fifteen years after the publication

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[1] J. R. Fleming, The Church in Scotland, 1875-1929 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1933), p.226.

of the famous Essays and Reviews (1860) and the more famous Origin of Species (1859), was at its pitch when the first volume of Wellhausen's History of Israel appeared in Germany (1878), and ended four years before the publication of the English translation (1885) for which Smith himself wrote the preface. No one would argue that the battle for the Bible began with William Robertson Smith or ended with George Adam Smith, but no one will deny that the last half of the nineteenth century was the period of the fiercest fighting.

When and where higher criticism began is an interesting question. The phrase was apparently used first by J. G. Eichhorn in the preface to the second edition of his Old Testament Introduction (1787). By higher criticism he meant the analysis of a book into its earlier and later elements for the purpose of investigating its "inner nature." He defended the genuineness of the books of the Old Testament, but in doing so he claimed the right to assume that most of the writings of the Hebrews had passed through several hands, as all ancient books had. It was necessary then that there should be in them an alternation of old and new passages. "Very few of them came from the hand of their authors in their present form", he said.[2] Thus to the already well established science of textual or "lower" criticism, having to do with various readings, corrupt readings and possible emendations of the text, there was added "higher" criticism, having to do with dates, authorship, unity of composition and the like, the higher building on the lower.

Most commentators agree that as a critic of Genesis Eichhorn had been preceded by Jean d'Astruc, at least in his results. For as

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[2] T. K. Cheyne, Founders of Old Testament Criticism (Methuen and Co., 1893), p.23. See also The Cambridge History of the Bible, vol.III, The West from the Reformation to the Present Day, edited by S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp.270-273.

early as 1753 the French medical doctor had distinguished two sources, the Jehovistic and Elohistic, in the earlier parts of the Pentateuch. Indeed Astruc had himself been preceded by another Frenchman, Richard Simon, who in 1680 drew attention to the fact that within the Book of Genesis the same event is often described in different words.[3] Spinoza and Witter are also named "founders of Old Testament Criticism." In any case the higher criticism most often associated in our own day with the name and theory of Wellhausen began at least a century, if not two, before the publication of his Prolegomena.[4]

Some would contend that as the Renaissance was the liberation of men's minds from the "dead weight of authority and tradition", the origins of modern criticism are to be found there. They also argue that "the Reformation, in the sense that it was a by-product of the Renaissance, assisted rather than hindered the process", and that Luther and Calvin took a critical approach to the Bible as they upheld the right of private judgement against an externally imposed authority.[5] Therefore "the Protestant writers against Rome

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[3]George Adam Smith, Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), p.33.

[4]To the strictly literary analysis of the Pentateuch Wellhausen added the thesis that "the Levitical law and connected parts of the Pentateuch were not written till after the fall of the kingdom of Judah, and that the Pentateuch in its present compass was not publicly accepted till the reformation of Ezra." Julius Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Israel (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1885), p. v.

[5]The Cambridge History of the Bible, vol. 3, The West from the Reformation to the Present Day, p.238.

were forging the weapons which were soon to be used against themselves."[6]

Others go farther back. Edward Gray has very interestingly attempted to show how higher criticism may be traced to the early Fathers of the Church. His study in fact does not begin, but rather ends, in the eighteenth century.[7] Moreover George Adam Smith thought that Christ and His Apostles should be claimed the Old Testament's first critics. Biblical criticism as we know it took its modern and revolutionary shape, however, sometime during, or just before the seventeen-hundreds, although there is no doubt a good deal in the argument that from the Renaissance onwards it was inevitable that the Bible too, along with almost everything else, would come within the scope of rational inquiry.

Modern higher criticism was revolutionary because its employment was a matter of heart as well as head. Does belief in the God of the Bible permit tampering with His written and inspired word? Does belief in the Christ of the New Testament forbid or does it encourage questioning the Old Testament of which He is the End but also the Authenticator? In other words, how is faith related to criticism? Is it possible to believe and criticise at the same time? In many cases criticism was plainly intended to be destructive of faith or was carried on by those who had little interest in the Old Testament except as a national literature. But this was by no means

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[6]Leslie Stephen, English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1876), vol, I, p.79, as quoted in The Cambridge History of the Bible, vol. 3, The West from the Reformation to the Present Day, p.238. For another statement of the beginnings of biblical criticism in the Reformation, see Edgar Krentz, The Historical-Critical Method (London: SPCK, 1975), pp.8-10.

[7]Edward McQueen Gray, Old Testament Criticism: Its Rise and Progress from the Second Century to the End of the Eighteenth (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1923).

true in every case. Although criticism's acceptance was undoubtedly hindered by its association with Deism or Rationalism on the one hand or Romanticism on the other, there began to emerge in the nineteenth century, both in Britain and on the Continent, an attempt to marry evangelical orthodoxy with modern methods of dealing with the Scriptures.

The attempt was by no means greeted with universal applause. While some have considered the trial of Robertson Smith the triumph of religious and academic freedom, others have declared that "the man was got out of the way, but the opinions of which he was the advocate remained . . . . The heresies of Robertson Smith . . . are the orthodoxies of the men who are his successors in Scotland today."[8]

How orthodox faith and higher criticism were related is the subject of the present study. The study is limited to "the period of the fiercest fighting." It is further limited to Scotland and the Free Church. And even though George Adam Smith's was the last impeachment for heresy for alleged attacks on the inspiration of Scripture and William Robertson Smith's the first, there stood behind both of them the silent figure of A. B. Davidson, according to T. K. Cheyne, the real founder of criticism in Scotland.[9] These three formed what one writer has described as "that great Scottish triad" in biblical studies[10] - thus "Faith and Criticism in post-Disruption Scotland, with particular reference to A. B. Davidson, William Robertson Smith, and George Adam Smith." What is intended is not so much to

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[8]Alexander Stewart and J. Kennedy Cameron, The Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1910: A Vindication (Edinburgh and Glasgow: William Hodge and Co., 1910), p.63.

[9]T. K. Cheyne, Founders of Old Testament Criticism, p.225.

[10]S. A. Cook, "George Adam Smith", The Expository Times, vol. LIV (October 1942-September 1943), p.33.

outline the views of the three men as to try to "get inside" them, by considering what they said on a variety of subjects to understand something of the phenomenon known as believing criticism. For it is the most interesting fact of all that it was the Church of the Disruption that seemed to have nurtured not only the most capable and most influential, but the most critical, of Scotland's biblical scholars. The question, now familiar, is why? Why did the church which prided itself on being the strictest evangelical body in Christendom seem to go farther than any other in setting forth revolutionary conceptions of the Bible? Apart from a consideration of the period from nearly all of its sides, no answer is possible. The final chapter is an attempt merely to suggest a way by which a solution might be approached, or at least what considerations a solution ought perhaps to include.[11]

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[11]Throughout this survey the terms old and new, traditional and modern, will be used in reference to the opponents in the debate. They are relative and neutral terms. None of them means "historical" or "orthodox" or "biblical." They are used here merely to distinguish between the sides, except where it is made clear that something more is intended.

CHAPTER ONE

GEORGE ADAM SMITH: "MODERN CRITICISM HAS WON ITS WAR"

The near-trial for heresy of George Adam Smith in 1902 was the first of its kind in the infant United Free Church of Scotland, born only Two years before by the union of the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterians. It was also the last of the series that began with the more famous Smith Case of 1876-1881. It has been all but forgotten now. Nonetheless in the way in which it was handled as well as in the questions it threw up it sheds considerable light on the issues of faith and criticism in the Free (United Free) Church sixty years after the Disruption. It also provides an entree into the views of one of the acknowledged leaders in Old Testament criticism in Scotland in the last half of the nineteenth century.

The Case

The case began at a meeting of ministers and elders of the United Free Church held in Edinburgh on 30th September 1901. There a Memorial was drawn up in which it was resolved "to call the earnest attention of the College Committee of the General Assembly to Professor George Adam Smith's recent work, entitled, 'Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament'."[1] The book, published only that year, was the Lyman Beecher Lectures which Smith had delivered at Yale University in 1899. Its publication constituted, the Memorial maintained, "an emphatic challenge to the Church for the toleration

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[1] "Memorial to the College Committee of the United Free Church of Scotland", Appendix I to the Special Report by the College Committee to the General Assembly of 1902, Report XI-A, Reports to the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland, 1902 (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1902). The Memorial consists of but one page.

or tacit approval of the revolutionary opinions therein set forth, which have awakened deep anxiety and unrest throughout the Church, and given pain to many who hold Professor Smith himself in affectionate esteem."[2] The "revolutionary opinions" were spelled out: "Professor Smith's affirmations as to the polytheistic character of the religion of Israel until the age of the great prophets"; as to "the absence of history" from the first nine chapters of Genesis, and their composition, to a large extent, "from the raw material of Babylonian myth and legend"; and as to "the fanciful and parabolic character of the patriarchal narratives." In addition, the memorialists craved special attention to Smith's "naturalistic treatment of Messianic prophecies, and to his far-reaching doctrine with respect to the Old Testament sacrificial system, and the nature and virtue of vicarious suffering in relation to the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.". They concluded by alleging that "Professor Smith's teaching in this book appears to be subversive of the historic truthfulness of considerable sections of Holy Scripture, and to be inconsistent with the Divine inspiration and authority of the Bible."[3]

The College Committee received the Memorial at its meeting on 22nd October. A Sub-Committee was appointed. The Sub-Committee "deemed it right to afford Professor Smith an opportunity of expressing his mind on the subject and of making any explanation he might think it desirable to offer."[4] Professor Smith appeared at a meeting of the Sub-Committee held 9th January 1902 and read a prepared statement. In his statement Smith contended that the memorialists "carefully ignore the general

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Special Report by the College Committee to the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland, 1902, pp.1-2.

purpose of the book, and in particular its detailed argument for the Old Testament as containing the authentic revelation of God, and its repeated affirmations of my personal belief in the same."[5] He took special issue with the memorialists' attempt to make the book appear to be destructive in effect if not in intent. Modern Criticism, he urged, was apologetic in purpose. "The volume is an essay in relief of faith; and an argument for the main truths of the Church's belief - so far as these were developed within the Old Testament."[6] He then proceeded to answer point by point the memorialists' grievances, including that concerning the sacrifice of Christ. He concluded by saying:

> I desire to assure the Committee that, if the anxiety excited in the Church by the critical views be considerable, I have on the other side, proofs that some of our leading divines have approved the principles of my volume and the treatment to which I have subjected them; and that to the minds of many, both ministers and laymen, these principles have already brought relief, with new joy and new experience of Divine Power, in the study and in the preaching of the Old Testament. 7

In its Report to the General Assembly of 1902 the College Committee gave Smith credit for approaching his subject "from the Christian position", and for showing himself, to be in full sympathy with "the Creed of the Church" in respect of the doctrines of the Incarnation, Atonement and "allied doctrines."[8] As regards the Bible, the Committee reported that

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[5]"Statement to the Sub-Committee of the College Committee of the United Free Church of Scotland, anent a Memorial against the volume Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament", Appendix II to the Special Report of the College Committee, p.9.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Ibid., p.18.

[8]Ibid., p.3.

in Smith's view the question raised "does not concern the fact of a Divine Revelation, but the manner in which it has been given."[9] The Committee took no exception with Smith on that. What they did take exception to was the way in which Smith had presented his views.

> Dr. Smith might, while stating them freely and fully, and claiming for them a calm and impartial hearing, have put them forward in a manner more considerate to the convictions and feelings he was seeking to correct. The conclusions which he advances are at times presented in a way that is fitted to perplex men who have no desire to fetter free and reverent inquiry, but who deprecate and are disturbed by hasty decision on matters of such vital moment as those involved. 10

The Report then instanced what are perhaps the most often quoted sentences in Smith's book. They come at the end of Lecture II. "Reviewing the whole of this Lecture," Smith had said, "we may say that Modern Criticism has won its war against the Traditional Theories. It only remains to fix the amount of the indemnity."[11] Rainy's biographer called the last phrase "a strangely infelicitous one for so brilliant a writer."[12] Understandably it irritated not a few.

On the subjects singled out for special attention by the memorialists, Smith's handling of Messianic Prophecy and Sacrifice and Atonement, the Committee's finding was fair, but non-committal.

> Opinions may differ as to the value of the views on which Dr. Smith lays special stress, and to which he attaches peculiar importance, in connection with these two subjects. But the Committee do not find that he has contradicted any part of the received doctrine of the Church, and do not feel it necessary to make a special report on these heads. They, however, think it right to say that his Statement with reference to them is helpful toward a clearer apprehension of his position, and therefore deserving careful attention. 13

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] George Adam Smith, Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), p.72.

[12] Patrick Carnegie Simpson, The Life of Principal Rainy, 2 volumes (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), vol: II, p.270.

[13] Special Report by the College Committee, p.3.

As for Smith's views of the Pentateuch and Hebrew history the Committee believed that "it would be wrong to make Dr. Smith personally responsible for a system of learned opinion which has for years been entertained by scholars of all the Church; which is not uncontradicted indeed, but prevalent, and has to be dealt with in a spirit of faith and patience."[14] The Report concluded:

> The Committee do not conceal from themselves that it is the duty of the Church at this time to take as a Church an attitude of forbearance and reserve, that duty is in some respects a difficult one. Many Christian minds apprehend that convictions and impressions dear to them are threatened by the critical movement: to many thoughtful ministers and people the movement appears to carry with it a serious range of consequences, affecting, not indeed the great fact of Divine Revelation, but our way of conceiving the method of revelation, and our way of apprehending it for our own guidance. These possibilities are regarded with an anxiety with which the Committee deeply sympathise. Nevertheless they do not hesitate as to the recommendation which they now humbly submit, that it is not the duty of the College Committee or of the Church to institute any process against Dr. Smith in connection with these Lectures. 15

The memorialists had anticipated the need for a reply and had drafted one "in vindication of the truth and justice of their Memorial."[16] It came in the form of a tract and was apparently distributed to members of the Assembly. It was not included in the Committee Report because, as the memorialists claimed, it was only at the eleventh hour that they had been put in possession of the Committee's Report. "But even at the eleventh hour", they said, "they consider it due to themselves, and to their brethren throughout the Church who agree with them, to publish a brief reply to the Report of the College Committee."[17] The Reply expressed general dissatisfaction with the Committee's Report and took

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[14] Ibid., p.6.

[15] Ibid., p.7.

[16] Reply of the Memorialists, (Edinburgh: Lorimer and Chalmers, 1902), p.1.

[17] Ibid.

up an hitherto un-debated issue, namely Smith's claim that although the Bible contains a revelation from God, it is not, even as a record of that revelation, absolutely reliable in every part.

> It is clear from Professor Smith's book, and is made still more clear by his statement to the Committee, that he draws a vital distinction between these two things. While he insists strongly on the fact, that in the Old Testament Scriptures we possess a veritable revelation of God, he makes it also emphatically evident, that he does not regard the record containing that revelation to be, in many portions, absolutely true and reliable, but the contrary. He fails to see, that if he calls in question the absolute truthfulness of the record, containing a Divine revelation, he is barred legitimately from taking advantage of the same record to prove the doctrine on which he insists. [18]

In the Assembly, Principal Rainy moved to decline any process against Professor Smith for his book, but at the same time declared that the Assembly "are not to be held as accepting or authorising the critical theories therein set forth." Rainy concluded:

> The Assembly desire to give expression to the unabated reverence cherished in this Church for the written Word, as the lively oracles through which the voice of God reaches His children for teaching, for comfort, and for admonition; and they declare their unwavering acceptance of it as the supreme rule of faith and life. And while they do not feel called upon to interfere with serious discussions of questions now raised, unless the interests of Christian truth should plainly seem to require it, the Assembly call upon ministers and professors who may take part in such discussions, to take care that reverence for Holy Scripture should be conspicuously manifest in their writings, and to treat, with the consideration that is plainly due, views hitherto associated in the minds of our people with the believing use of the Bible. [19]

Rainy was urging caution on both sides; and he had exactly described the nature of the issue when he spoke of "views hitherto associated in the minds of our people with the believing use of the Bible." That

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[18] Ibid., pp.3,4. (Italics are the Reply's.)

[19] Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the United Free Church of Scotland, 1902, (Edinburgh: Lorimer and Chalmers, 1902), pp.90-91. It probably should be noted that the Proceedings for the United Free Church for 1902 are available, so far as I can see, only in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

association in the mind was precisely what Smith sought to show up as untenable and his opponents defended as biblical.

Professor Orr rose "with some diffidence" to second Rainy's motion. He felt moved to do so not only by a sense of loyalty to an honourable colleague but because he felt that the action proposed was the right one. He had the conviction that if some of the many misunderstandings which beclouded the case were cleared away, it would be found that the parties on the opposite sides were not after all so far apart as perhaps they imagined. He asked for toleration. He asked those who opposed Dr. Rainy's motion, those who "stood before the public in their motions as the peculiar defenders of God's revelation and God's Word," to believe that there were persons in the Assembly who were just as zealous as they were for the honour of God's Word, and yet were persuaded that a process against Dr. Smith would not be just to Smith, or in the interests of truth or the peace and harmony of the Church, but would be a prolongation of needless strife and a source of incalculable embitterment and unsettlement. Orr said he shared Rainy's view that what was at stake was not the attitude to Smith's book only but to the critical movement as a whole. Criticism, he maintained, was with them, for good or for evil - he believed it more for good than evil - and they must face the fact.[20]

It is recorded that a lively debate followed, including a motion to thank the Committee for their Report but not to accept it, on the grounds that it failed to deal with the main issue, namely Professor Smith's doctrine of revelation, and that it "defers unduly to certain critical positions."[21]

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[20] Ibid., pp.96-97.

[21] Ibid., p.105.

"With the very greatest reluctance", and in what Simpson terms "a fine and feeling utterance," Smith himself intervened in the debate.[22] He maintained that it was not his critical views but misrepresentations of them that had "wrought harm and led many to entertain unbelieving and infidel notions concerning the Old Testament."[23] "I want to repeat what I have said often enough and plainly enough," he declared, "that from the bottom of my heart I believe in the Bible as the revelation of God to sinful man . . . a thing . . . which found me long before I found it."[24] Then in a few short paragraphs he set out his views, theologically not nearly precise enough but creditably delivered considering the circumstances. He had never claimed, he said, that there is "any discrepancy between the one Testament and the other," nor had he refrained from following out "the very close and intimate connection that prevails between the two." The two Testaments "come from the same Divine Hand" and "the one great proof of their divinity is the ethical and historical closeness of connection which exists between them."[25] And on the relationship of the Old Testament to Christ:

> I have fully pointed out, I believe, in my book, how from first to last the Spirit of Christ prevails through the Old Testament, and how we have there from the earliest times of prophecy to the very end of the old dispensation a large number of predictions, not merely of the appearance of an earthly Messiah with political functions, though these were also valuable and fulfilled in Christ, but the prediction and prophecy of the appearance of the unseen God in human flesh and weakness, sharing the ethical warfare of His people, and bearing not merely that conflict, but the curse and shame of their sins. These prophecies I have discussed, though my discussion of them has been ignored by all who have attacked me, and these prophecies, I believe with all my heart to have been fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth, and by Him alone among men . . . . This history of the Divine Passion, predicted in the prophets,

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[22] Simpson, The Life of Principal Rainy, vol. II, pp.271-273, provides a summary of the Assembly debates.

[23] Proceedings and Debates, p.115.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

> and fulfilled in Jesus, is what gives to our Scriptures their perennial and their Divine value; not their inerrance, not that they satisfy this or that theory of inspiration, whether it be old or whether it be new, I care not - but that they and they alone of all books that ever appeared in the world tell the story of that warfaring and suffering love of God, which in heaven above from all eternity, and in the person of Jesus Christ, amidst our temptations, bore our sicknesses, carried our sorrows, and at last, as St. Peter said, "in His own body bore our sins upon the tree." 26

The Proceedings inform us that Smith's remarks were followed by "loud and prolonged applause." Rainy acknowledged Smith's "interesting and impressive statement" but at the same time supposed "they were in order to be frank in speaking to one another." He then drew a distinction between the merits of Smith's book as a scholarly work and the effect it would produce upon the popular mind. As regards the first it was brilliant and sincere, fitted for discussion amongst ministers; as regards the second he did not think it "perfectly happy." Yet critical arguments must be met on their own merits, he maintained, not by arguments which place belief in the Bible on some higher plane. He desired only that the decision of the Assembly should be as much as possible a united decision. His motion to dismiss the case carried by a majority of 271.[27]

Biography

At the time of his near-trial George Adam Smith was Professor of Old Testament Language, Literature and Theology in the United Free Church College, Glasgow. He remained there until 1909 when he moved to Aberdeen to become Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University, a post he held until his retirement in 1935. He was born 19th October 1856 in Calcutta

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[26] Ibid., p.116.

[27] Ibid. Simpson tells us that the actual count was 534 to 263, The Life of Principal Rainy, vol. II, p.273.

where his father was editor of The Calcutta Review. With him and his younger brother Dunlop, his mother returned to Restalrig in Edinburgh in 1858. She soon went out again, leaving the boys in the care of two aunts who reared them, as well as the five other Smith children (three girls and two boys) who were subsequently brought back from India. Both parents returned to establish a home in Edinburgh's Merchiston area in 1875.

Smith received his schooling at Edinburgh's Royal High School. At eighteen he took a degree in Arts from the University of Edinburgh, resolved, as he had been from his early boyhood, to become a minister. In the Autumn of 1875 he entered New College where he graduated three years later. While there he was greatly influenced by A. B. Davidson and enjoyed the company of many who were to remain his life-long friends, among them Henry Drummond whose biography he would later write. His summers were spent in Germany, the first at Leipzig, the second at Tübingen, studying under Professors Delitzsch and Harnack and others. Following his graduation from New College he made the first of many trips to the Middle East. Upon his return he was assistant minister for a short time in Brechin until he was appointed to teach Hebrew and Old Testament in the Free Church College in Aberdeen, the temporary replacement for the recently deposed William Robertson Smith. On 20th April 1882 he was ordained by the Presbytery of Aberdeen and on 23rd April he preached his first sermon in Queen's Cross Church, the beginning of a ten-year ministry there. From Aberdeen he went to the Hebrew Chair in Glasgow where in another ten years he was to confront the General Assembly in the last and by then the least likely to succeed of Scotland's biblical criticism cases.

Smith's was a life full of work, variety and honour. As a young man he had climbed in the Swiss Alps and travelled by mule through Palestine.

While at Queen's Cross he had been a member of the Scottish Geographical Society and Secretary of the Geographical Section when the British Association met in Aberdeen in 1885. He made lecture tours to the United States in 1896, 1899, 1903, and 1909. In 1916 he was knighted and in the same year appointed Moderator of the General Assembly of the United Free Church. During the First World War he was asked by the Foreign Office to go to America in aid of the Allied cause, which he did in 1918. He also visited Scottish troops in France and Belgium. Two years prior to his retirement from the Vice-Chancellorship at Aberdeen he was made a Chaplain to the King. Besides all of that there were honorary degrees from Edinburgh, Yale, Aberdeen, Dublin, Cambridge, St. Andrews, Oxford, Glasgow, Sheffield and Durham, as well as commentaries on various Old Testament books, several collections of sermons, numerous articles and what are in many ways his best works, the more technical Historical Geography of the Holy Land and two volume Jerusalem: From Earliest Times to 70 A.D. His wife, whom he married in 1889, was the former Lilian Buchanan, daughter of a London doctor and Medical Officer. They had three sons and four daughters. The two oldest, George Buchanan and Robert Dunlop, were killed in action in the 1914-18 War. Their daughter Kathleen died just three weeks before Smith himself. He died, aged 86, at Sweethillocks, near Balerno, southwest of Edinburgh, on 3rd March, 1942.[28]

Smith's reputation was based largely on his combination of critical scholarship and Christian zeal. When he was yet minister at Queen's Cross,

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[28]There is no thorough study of Smith and his work. There is however George Adam Smith: A Personal Memoir and Family Chronicle by his widow, Lilian Adam Smith (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1943); also S. A. Cook's George Adam Smith, 1856-1942, from The Proceedings of the British Academy, volume XXVIII (London: Humphrey Milford Amen House, 1942); Cook's biographical essay, "George Adam Smith" The Expository Times, volume LIV (Oct. 1942-Sept. 1943), pp.33-37; the DNB article by William Manson; and several occasional warm references to Smith by his close friend, James Denny in The Letters of Principal James Denney to W. Robertson Nicoll, 1893-1917 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920).

he had attracted the attention of Dr. Alexander Whyte, then looking for a junior colleague; and although the more orthodox of Whyte's congregation "could not easily reconcile themselves to the prospect of having a minister who explicitly maintained that the latter portion of the Book of Isaiah dated from the period of the Exile," Dr. Whyte himself "would not disavow the critical views of one who combined them with so ardently evangelical a message."[29] Carnegie Simpson, a close friend of Smith's, says that "Dr. Smith was one of those scholars whose combination of advanced critical views with unswerving allegiance to the evangelical faith had done much to avert that 'landslide' regarding vital Christian doctrine which Dr. Rainy had apprehended would take place when criticism entered into the general mind."[30]

Smith was an enviably productive scholar and quite obviously a very gifted one, but in his technical writings it is not the scholarship that stands out. It is the man himself, his personality and character. The point is illustrated by S. A. Cook, Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge. In one place he says of Smith: ". . . not only will he be remembered for his many contributions to Biblical studies, but he belongs, with A. B. Davidson and Robertson Smith, to that great Scottish triad who mark an epoch in this field of research by their ability to carry their contemporaries with them over the gulf that severs earlier 'pre-critical' Old Testament studies and the attitude and spirit that subsequently came to prevail."[31] In another place Cook says, however:

> G.A.S., the last of the trio, was never a prodigy of learning; he had not the profound erudition and dialectical incisiveness of W.R.S., and his scholarship, which came to the fore in his more technical writings, underlies his work as an expositor, though the scholarship is not always

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[29] G. F. Barbour, The Life of Alexander Whyte (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), p.397.

[30] Simpson, The Life of Principal Rainy, vol. II, pp.269-270.

[31] S. A. Cook, "George Adam Smith", The Expository Times, vol. LIV, p.33.

> that of the last decade or so. If in G.A.S. the scholar lies behind the preacher, in W.R.S. the preacher lay behind the scholar and teacher, and A.B.D. combined--as the record of his pupils testifies--preacher, teacher, and scholar. Nor was G.A.S. the theologian and philosopher that A.B.D. was; . . . 32

William Manson said of him: "Critical thought on technical matters has moved forward since his time, but the perennial value of the religious and ethical appeal of his writings remains undiminished."[33] James Denney, a devoted friend, has the highest praise for Smith's integrity and kindness, and regards him as a thoroughly educated man, except in philosophy.[34] Of himself Smith once remarked, "I have no gifts of philosophy nor powers of original speculation. Beyond the Christian faith and love of hard work which I owe to my father and mother, I have little except perhaps some ability to interpret to the present age the messages of the ancient prophets."[35]

Smith's distinguishing mark was his ability as an interpreter, perhaps a "modernizer."[36] Every account of his life gives pride of place to the eloquence and effectiveness of his preaching, his power to adapt the message of the Bible to the needs of the present. Doubtless he would have appreciated having it said of himself what he said of the Israelite prophet:

> He is not a philosopher nor a theologian with a system of doctrine (at least before Ezekiel), but the messenger and herald of God at some crises in the life or conduct of His people. His message is never out of touch with

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[32] S. A. Cook, "George Adam Smith, 1856-1942," The Proceedings of the British Academy, vol. XXVIII (London: Humphrey Milford Amen House, 1942), p.23.

[33] Dictionary of National Biography 1941-1950, pp.792-794. See also The Scotsman of 9th March, 1942.

[34] Letters of James Denney to W. Robertson Nicoll, pp.78-79.

[35] George Adam Smith, a speech delivered in Glasgow 1st March, 1910, upon his leaving for Aberdeen University and the Principalship there.

[36] S. A. Cook, "George Adam Smith", The Expository Times, vol. LIV, p.34.

> events. These form either the subject-matter or the proof or the execution of every oracle he utters. It is, therefore, God not merely as Truth, but far more as Providence, whom the prophet reveals. 37

Smith: Believing Critic

The absence of theology is conspicuous in Smith's writings and might give the impression that he had none. On the central Christian doctrines, however, he was clear enough: "What is Catholic Truth?", he once asked:

> It is the Fatherhood of God: it is the Divinity of our Blessed Saviour: it is the atoning virtue of His Death: it is His Resurrection: it is the giving of the Holy Ghost: it is the existence in this world of a Catholic and imperishable Church of Christ: it is the hope of Christ's Second Advent to judge the world, and the certainty of Eternal Life for believers through Him. 38

Even while arguing that the Deliverer promised in Isaiah 7.14 was not "a god in a metaphysical sense", he felt it important to add, "though we firmly hold that Jesus Christ was God."[39]

Smith was not only orthodox, he was evangelical. At least Cook maintains that "evangelical fervour is, I think, the distinctive note of G.A.S.",[40] and one of his severer critics, James Johnston, made a point of extolling his "high character as an evangelical Christian, the sincerity and earnestness of his zeal, the purity of his motives

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[37] George Adam Smith, The Book of the Twelve Prophets Commonly Called the Minor, two volumes, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1896), vol. I, p.13.

[38] George Adam Smith, "A Few Plain Words to the Younger Members of My Congregation on the Differences between Presbyterianism and Episcopacy and the Alleged Possibility of a Union", a sermon preached on Sunday evening, 19th October, 1884 (Aberdeen: W. and W. Lindsay, 1884), p.13.

[39] George Adam Smith, The Book of Isaiah, The Expositor's Bible, two volumes (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903), vol. I, p.136.

[40] S. A. Cook, "George Adam Smith", The Expository Times, vol. LIV, p.35.

and the winsome piety of his style."[41]

What did Smith himself mean by the word? In Modern Criticism he defined evangelical as "concerned with faith, and the assistance of souls in darkness, and the equipment of the Church of Christ for her ministry of God's Word."[42] In his Life of Henry Drummond he referred to D. L. Moody's Scottish campaigns of 1873-75 as an attempt "to win men for a better life, and to pour fresh power into the routine of Christian work."[43] Moody's theology, Smith added, was "stiff, some might say mechanical, but it was never abstract. To use a good old word, it was thoroughly experimental and busied with the actual life of men."[44] Smith had participated in the Great Mission and his account of his experience, even after twenty-five years reflection, is warm and sincere.[45] Still it is doubtful if Smith and Moody could be called evangelical in the same sense: their respective emphases were different, they were poles apart in their views of the Old Testament, and those who sided with Moody were often, though not always, hostile to Smith.[46]

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[41] James Johnston, a pamphlet entitled "Destructive Results of the Higher Criticism as Disclosed in Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament" (London: Elliot Stock, 1901), p.3.

[42] George Adam Smith, Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1901), p.28.

[43] George Adam Smith, The Life of Henry Drummond (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), p.56.

[44] Ibid., p.58.

[45] All of chapter IV of The Life of Henry Drummond is given over to the Moody and Sankey Revival, and pp.64-65 recount Smith's own participation in it.

[46] Lilian Adam Smith, George Adam Smith: A Personal Memoir and Family Chronicle, p.120. I am aware that I may appear to have confused evangelical with evangelistic, but I am only trying to point a contrast. There probably would have been little doubt that Moody was an evangelical, but there was doubt in some quarters whether Smith was. Smith's assessment of the effects of Moody's campaigns and Moody-style Evangelicalism is found in The Life of Henry Drummond, pp.90ff.

It cannot be said of George Adam Smith, however, as it was of William Robertson Smith, that he had an imperfect feeling for the pastoral concerns of the Church.[47] On the contrary. It was his view, for instance, that professors ought first to have been pastors, because, as he urged, "the final end of our Colleges is the equipment of preachers of God's Word and pastors of His people - that in them the most perfect scholarship of which we are capable is indeed coveted earnestly, along with all other best gifts, but only for the sake of the practical ministry of the Church both at home and abroad."[48] And of "the Wisdom who breathes through the whole Old Testament", he said, "Her joy you see in its art and eloquence, but the passion of her heart you find in its yearning to win men for God and for righteousness."[49]

Nonetheless the memorialists had charged that Smith's critical views were "revolutionary" and had "awakened deep anxiety and unrest throughout the Church." Others argued that they were "endangering the faith and salvation of anxious souls."[50] Moreover Smith himself admitted that "where criticism has been conducted in a purely empirical spirit and without loyalty to Christ, it has shaken the belief of some in the fundamentals of religion, distracted others from the zealous service of God, and benumbed the preaching of Christ's gospel."[51] He was not slow to add, however, that "any one who has had practical dealings with the doubt and religious bewilderment of his day can testify that those who have been led into unbelief by modern criticism

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[47] James Strahan, Andrew Bruce Davidson (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), pp.240-245.

[48] George Adam Smith, The Preaching of the Old Testament to the Age, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1893), p.9.

[49] Ibid., p.45.

[50] Johnston, "Destructive Results of the Higher Criticism", p.9.

[51] Modern Criticism, p.25.

are not for one moment to be compared in number with those who have fallen from faith over the edge of the opposite extreme."[52]

The first concern of both Smith and his opponents was not criticism as such but its effect on Christian faith. Smith wanted to show that the effect was good, his opponents that it was bad. According to Smith, modern criticism had left the Old Testament "fortified, explored, illuminated, made habitable for modern men."[53] According to Johnston, this balancing of faith and criticism was a kind of gymnastic feat, an intellectual prank, possible to men of trained intellect, perhaps, but impossible to children and "the poor, to whom the gospel is preached."[54] Smith's offense was that he had removed the subject "from the esoteric to the exoteric school" and had brought it down to the understanding of the man in the street, to a class of readers "who do not comprehend the fine distinctions by which acute or philosophic minds can reconcile a sceptical and severe criticism of the Word of God with a simple and saving faith in underlying truths."[55] In Smith, Johnston maintained, head and heart were not at one.

> The work cannot be understood apart from the personality of the writer. There is a twofold vein of spiritual and intellectual life in the person and his work, like the warp and woof in the web of life. The one like that which moulded the character of Ruskin - a mother's influence. Dr. Smith, who calls attention to that element in the formation of the character of the Art Critic, will pardon my reference to the pious influence of a noble mother as the conservative element in himself as a sacred critic. The savour of that unction of piety which filled his nursery now fills the church. The other, the progressive element, comes from the schools of continental criticism. They meet, but do not combine. There is a duality in the Author and in his book. But the holy oil of the nursery will not mix with the secular water of the German Schools. The one is from above, the other is of the earth and tastes of the earth.[56]

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[52] Ibid., pp.25-26.

[53] Ibid., p.85.

[54] Johnston, "Destructive Results of the Higher Criticism", pp.12-13.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., pp.6-7.

The controversy was in no sense purely academic. Smith was culpable not only or primarily because he was rejecting the verbal inspiration of the Bible, but because in so doing he was undermining faith.

Smith considered himself a believing critic. On the one hand he was, as Cook wrote in 1942, "a powerful exponent of the now ruling position in the literary criticism of the Old Testament which is commonly associated with the name of Wellhausen and dates from the seventies and eighties of the last century."[57] On the other hand, as Smith himself declared, he divorced himself from "the rationalism which cuts the sinews of a preacher - the rationalism which before now has emptied the Christian pulpit of faith and of fire."[58] He was even more explicit: he drew a doctrinal distinction between the leaders of criticism in Britain and some on the Continent. Ours, he said in his countrymen's defense, still affirm the truths which must be the strength of all Christian preaching. "The sovereign grace of God to sinful men, the Divinity of our Lord, His atoning death and resurrection, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church - these are held and held heartily by Critics among us, the most learned, the most sane, the most free, the most advanced."[59]

Smith clearly regarded himself as a thoroughly modern scholar, but he did not rush to accept every result of the higher criticism. In the preface to the first edition of his best known work, The Historical Geography of the Holy Land, he wrote:

> I have felt forced by geographical evidence to contest some of the textual and historical conclusions of recent critics, but I have accepted the critical methods, and I believe this to be the first geography of the Holy Land in which they are employed. At this time of day, it would be futile to think of writing the geography of

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[57] S. A. Cook, "George Adam Smith", The Expository Times, vol. LIV, p.35.

[58] George Adam Smith, The Preaching of the Old Testament to the Age, pp.32-33.

[59] Ibid.

Palestine on any other principles.[60]

Similarly in Twelve Prophets: "we shall keep in mind that the results of an independent inquiry are uncertain; and that in this new criticism of the prophets, which is comparatively recent, we cannot hope to arrive for some time at so general a consensus, as is being rapidly reached in the far older and more elaborated criticism of the Pentateuch."[61]

Smith's general position, Cook claimed, was "usually 'moderate', though with a definite trend towards the Right rather than to the Left."[62] The definite trend toward the right may be accounted for by his doctrinal orthodoxy. Or it may be that he was not interested in criticism as such, accepting it as he did because as an honest scholar he believed he must. Indeed, if we take Cook's view that in Smith the scholar lay behind the preacher, we may assume that Smith's interest in criticism was primarily an interest in its practical results. Modern Criticism, says Cook,

> stands out as a determined though thoroughly persuasive effort to justify the right of criticism, to give some account of the methods and conclusions of the critical movement, and to explain its effects upon the Old Testament as the record of a Divine Revelation: criticism, so far from injuring the cause of religion, had contributed positively to the development of Christianity.[63]

Like that of every other Free Church critic before him, Smith's position was as much a reaction against views of the Bible which he believed were a hindrance to faith as it was an embrace of those he believed to be a help. He praised his teacher A. B. Davidson for his attempts to break up the mechanical ideas of inspiration which prevailed in the churches and for his insight into the spiritual meaning of Scripture which made his

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[60] George Adam Smith, The Historical Geography of the Holy Land (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), p.xv.

[61] Twelve Prophets, vol. I, pp.8-9. See also Isaiah, vol. II, pp.336ff. for a criticism of Criticism.

[62] S. A. Cook, "George Adam Smith, 1856-1942", The Proceedings of the British Academy, vol. XXVIII, p.8.

[63] Ibid., p.10.

students' use of the Bible "more rational and lively."[64] The methods of modern criticism for Smith provided a kind of safety valve which allowed men to explain or disregard what is offensive in the Old Testament and still believe in the goodness of God.[65] It was not so, he claimed, with the view which holds to a "wholesale and literal acceptance of the Scriptures of the Old Testament."

> Unable upon so rigid a theory to account for the discrepancies in the Old Testament or to reconcile their belief in the goodness of God with the affirmations which are frequent in the Old Testament of divine sanction for pitiless tempers or actual atrocities, men and women, in greater numbers than is generally realized, are reduced to the dilemma of either denying that goodness or casting away the whole Old Testament.[66]

Smith vehemently opposed what he called "dogmas of verbal inspiration."[67] What he meant by the phrase may be seen, in part, in an interesting parallel.

> In Mohammedanism the Koran is the standard and authority alike for literature, for logic, for philosophy, for social life, and for politics. It is a well-known Moslem saying that every other book than the Koran, and the legal writings based upon it, is either superfluous or positively dangerous. And this opinion with all the fatal conservatism which it implies, is due to the belief that the Koran was written in heaven, composed word for word by God Himself, and dictated to His servant Mohammed. It is exactly as if Christians, ignoring the authority of Christ and all the difference He has made, were to consider themselves bound by the letter of the Old Testament; obliged to adopt the beliefs which it presupposes, for instance that the sun goes round the earth and not the earth round the sun, or its crude and primitive physiology or were bound by the social institutions of polygamy, slavery and so forth, which it enforces and for which it legislates.[68]

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[64] Life of Henry Drummond, pp.43-44.

[65] George Adam Smith, "The Teaching of the Old Testament in Schools", an address to the Conference of University Tutors and Schoolmasters at Cambridge, January, 1923 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), pp.5-6.

[66] Ibid., p.5.

[67] Ibid.

[68] George Adam Smith, "Mohammedanism and Christianity". A sermon preached on September 30th, 1908 at the Autumn Session of the Baptist Missionary Society, held in Bradford. (London: Arthur H. Stockwell, n.d.), pp.26-27.

It is easy enough to appreciate how someone like Johnston would find it difficult to conceive of an alliance between evangelical zeal and critical method and so conclude that Smith's religion and Smith's scholarship "meet but do not combine." But there is reason to believe that between his view of the nature of Christian faith and his view of the nature of the Bible there existed for Smith very little inconsistency.

Smith's View Of The Bible

It is not insignificant that Smith's Inaugural Lecture in Glasgow and the book that led to his impeachment both had to do with preaching. His primary concern was always the communication of what he believed to be the Old Testament's central message; he cared only secondarily for the detailed technicalities of the method by which that message was discovered on the one hand or for doctrines concerning the nature of the Bible on the other. Everywhere the stress is on the application of God's word to human life. Very rarely, and then usually only parenthetically or incidentally, is there any direct approach to the question of method; less frequently is there anything like a statement, theologically framed, regarding inspiration or revelation or the exact form of the divine address. But even though Smith's views on such things are seldom formally stated, they are nonetheless made clear enough in the context of his discussions of other topics; and they are inextricably bound up with the message which throughout he saw as his obligation to preach.

Consistent with the spirit of the times, and as well perhaps with his own self-confessed lack of speculative powers, Smith denied that the Bible was a catalogue of proof-texts to be used in support of dogma. In defense of a critical assessment of its individual characters, he eloquently denounced the use of the Old Testament as a mere theological compendium.

> It has been abused by employing those characters in illustration of some utterly irrelevant doctrine or office of the Christian Church. They can be so employed only after you have killed the real life out of them. How often has one seen an Old Testament character, whom one once knew alive, bound to the chariot wheels of some violent dogmatist and dragged round the whole citadel of Christian theology, till there was as much life left in the battered corpse as in Hector's own![69]

Not that Smith thought there was absolutely no theology in the Old Testament. In one place at least he maintained that its theology was the chief subject for which the preacher ought to study it.[70] But what he meant by theology was what he termed "its theology, properly so called"; and by that he meant the fact that the message of the Old Testament "is summed up in one word - the word God."

> It is because God stands near to men and is interested in all their life, that the doctrine of the Old Testament is so practical, so incisive, so homely. It is because He is omnipotent that the hopes and ideals of righteousness are so certain of fulfilment. The law is but the result of His character. The long history is but His patience and His judgement. The prophecy is the consciousness of His compulsion. The very style of the Old Testament is due to its sense of God.[71]

In this passage Smith came very near to saying that ideas of God precede and determine men's response to Him, and so might be interpreted as saying that doctrine is of primary importance. It would be much more in line with Smith's overall construction however to interpret him as saying that the "sense of God" is the first thing. It is that sense of Him that bears with it or includes in it a consciousness of His attributes. His attributes are not cognitively received truths about Him propositionally delivered. In fact it is precisely Smith's view that Old Testament revelation is <u>not</u> a revelation of propositions, but rather a revelation of God Himself. As he put it in <u>Modern Criticism</u>:

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[69] <u>The Preaching of the Old Testament to the Age</u>, p.48.

[70] <u>Ibid</u>., p.56.

[71] <u>Ibid</u>., pp.57-58.

> In contrast to some modern theories, which regard Revelation as the communication by supernatural means of many kinds of truth - which, as we have just seen, Israel did not hesitate to borrow from the traditions of other peoples - Revelation by the Hebrew writers is limited to the Revelation of God Himself; and that not of the fact of His existence, which the Old Testament takes for granted, but of His ethical character and will for men.[72]

The subject of the chapter in which this statement appears is "The Proof of a Divine Revelation in the Old Testament"; but although there is this brief discussion of the meaning of Revelation at the beginning, the question for Smith, as the statement itself indicates, was not primarily, as he put it, "one as to its origins, but one as to its contents."[73] What Smith wanted to show was that God on His own initiative had revealed Himself and His purpose for mankind through early Israel, and that that could be proven by reference to the unique understanding of God which had been gradually developed through all the stages of her national life. Although God adapted Himself to primitive conceptions at first, by degrees He showed Himself to be One and Holy, until in the prophets preeminently and in Christ finally, His person and purposes were fully realized. Thus God's revelation, Smith believed, is of a piece with His character and will; for His revelation is a revelation of His character and His character determines the content of His will.[74] Near the end of the chapter Smith summed up:

> We have seen that the gradual ethical development, which thus differentiated Israel from her neighbors, appears to have begun with the introduction to the nation of Jahweh as their God; and that every stage of its progress was achieved in connection with some impression of His character.[75]

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[72] Modern Criticism, p.113.

[73] Ibid., p.114.

[74] Ibid., pp.142-144.

[75] Ibid., p.142.

Any discussion of Smith's doctrine of Scripture or his doctrine of revelation, becomes, almost immediately, a discussion of the content of revelation, i.e. its message. It is the uniqueness of the Old Testament's message as found in its monotheism, its superior morality, and the fact that it alone amongst those of all the Semitic religions led to Christ, that constitutes its authenticity as a divine revelation and therefore its inspiration. As he told the Sub-Committee:

> Thus, while compelled by the evidence of Scripture itself, I have stated the belief that the religion of Israel started from the level of those of other Semitic peoples, I have with equal emphasis pointed out that in the course of time it grew into a monotheism, which is unique in the Semitic world; that this unique monotheism is due to the identification of the national god of Israel with the supreme righteousness; and that the appearance in the religion of Israel of such an identification cannot be explained by physical, intellectual, or political conditions, because other Semitic peoples shared these equally with Israel; but it is explicable only by the theory that God Himself gradually revealed that identification to Israel in the events of their history and through the minds of their greatest men. What else is Revelation than such a series of impressions of His character and Will, made by God Himself upon the mind of His people?[76]

The Bible, in Smith's conception, is not itself a revelation, but the record of a revelation, or more precisely, the record of a history of revelation, for it is the essentially progressive character of the revelation - in God's acts and His impressions on men's minds - which is paramount in his view of Scripture. Indeed the genius of the Bible is precisely in this, that it is a record of a history which overcomes itself; to see it any other way is to violate its sacred intent.

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[76] Statement to Sub-Committee, p.11. It is this belief in the supernatural origins of Israel's religion that made Smith, according to his Glasgow colleague James Orr, a believing critic as opposed to a naturalistic one. James Orr, Revelation and Inspiration (London: Duckworth and Co., 1910), pp.12ff. Cook called Orr the "author of perhaps the best book antagonistic to Old Testament criticism" ('George Adam Smith, 1850-1942", The Proceedings of the British Academy, vol. XXVIII, p.11), although it was probably Orr's The Problem of the Old Testament to which he was referring.

> Do not let us do the Bible the childish injustice of estimating it by things which its spirit finally outgrew: the defeat and outdistancing of which represent its divine victory and triumph. Do not let us condemn the Old Testament practices and tempers, which its prophets themselves condemn. Let us rather measure the Bible by the unity of ethical purpose which it manifests from first to last, by the completeness with which it leaves behind every trace of a defective morality, and by the uncompromising and invincible opposition, which the spirit of it offers to every political and religious interest, that insinuates itself as a substitute for the ethical service of God.[77]

The question of the historicity of the Old Testament record, Smith, generally speaking, thought irrelevant, primarily because he believed that "the sacred writers aimed at something higher than the bare reproduction of primitive history."[78] What the biblical authors wanted and achieved, Smith contended, was "the creation of types of character essentially historical", and the eternal value of their achievement lies in this, that they not only "portray with wonderful fidelity the tempers, aspirations and experiences of Israel and her neighbors", but also "discover human nature, as it is in every race of mankind, and clearly tell of the reality of God, as they themselves had been inspired by His Spirit to find Him."[79] We cannot refuse the authors of the Patriarchal narratives a certain dramatic license which we as preachers permit to ourselves, Smith said. On the other hand, and more important: "As preachers, we cannot refuse to follow the narratives of Genesis till we refuse to follow the parables of Jesus."[80]

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[77] George Adam Smith, The Forgiveness of Sins and Other Sermons (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), pp.35-36. See also "The Teaching of the Old Testament in Schools", p.6.

[78] Modern Criticism, p.108.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid., p.109.

> If criticism with the help of archaeology, has failed to establish the literal truth of these stories as personal biographies, it has on the other hand displayed their utter fidelity to the characters of the peoples they reflect, and to the facts of the world and the Divine guidance in which these peoples developed. The power of the Patriarchal narratives on the heart, the imagination, the faith of men can never die: it is immortal with truthfulness to the realities of human nature and of God's education of mankind.[81]

The stories of the Patriarchs, Smith believed, probably have at the heart of them historical elements - there has been a reaction of late, he claimed, in favour of admitting the personal reality of Abraham, no one has ever doubted that of Moses, and Joshua's personality "rests to-day on surer grounds than in the earlier stages of criticism" - but on the present evidence "it is impossible to be sure of more than that they contain a substratum of actual personal history."[82]

> But who wants to be sure of more? Who needs to be sure of more? If there be a preacher who thinks that the priceless value of these narratives to his work depends on the belief that they are all literal history, let him hold that belief if he can, and confidently use them. Or if he cannot believe that Genesis is literal history, and yet thinks it must needs be, in order to be used as God's Word, let him seek his texts elsewhere: his field is wide and inexhaustible.[83]

The phrase "in order to be used as God's Word" is pregnant with implications and perhaps reveals a very great deal of Smith's doctrine of Scripture. He did not develop it. As with the question of the absolute historicity of the documents, [redacted] technically theological considerations are lost in the greater theme of the preaching of the Old Testament.[84] For all the lack of a full and refined statement of

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., pp.106-107.

[83] Ibid., pp.107-108.

[84] An excellent illustration of the point is found in Lecture VII of Modern Criticism, pp.237ff. Smith came as close as he ever did to an extended discussion of Reformation principles of interpretation. The theme of the lecture (which is the longest in the book) is, however, "The Prophets as Preachers to Their Own Times: With Their Influence on the Social Ethics of Christendom"; and very quickly Smith reminds us (p.242) that his purpose in it is not to give the Reformer's doctrine of Scripture in full - he tells us in a footnote where to look for that - but to look at the practical effects of their exegetical methods.

his view of Scripture, however, there was not the least ambiguity about what Smith opposed.

> The dogma of a verbal inspiration, the dogma of the equal divinity of all parts of Scripture, the refusal to see any development either from the ethnic religions to the religion of Israel, or any development within the religion of Israel itself - all these have had a disastrous influence upon the religions thought and action of our time.[85]

The Progress And Development Of Old Testament Religion

Smith freely acknowledged his belief that the God whom early Israel worshipped was worshipped by them as a tribal God, that He shared many of the characteristics of other Semitic gods and was worshipped in much the same way as they were, that His worship was regarded as confined to Israel's territory, and that while Israel was obliged to worship and obey Him alone, such obligation did not exclude a belief in the reality of other gods.[86] Whatever may be the status of such a view today, Smith, for his part, believed that no other conception of religion than the tribal was possible to any Semitic people at that early period. He believed that God in revealing Himself to men has to condescend to their intellectual conceptions of Him at the period at which such revelation takes place, and that the progress of such revelation must necessarily be gradual, "slowly upwards from the religious levels at which it finds man towards the full expression of the truth about God."[87]

Smith maintained that the early prophet of <u>all</u> Semitic peoples was "the mouth of justice, the rebuke of evil, the champion of the wronged." Even though their method of speaking by the aid of visions and dreams and

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[85] <u>Modern Criticism</u>, p.26.

[86] Smith's Statement to the Sub-Committee, p.10.

[87] <u>Ibid</u>., p.11. See also Smith's essay "The Hebrew Genius as Exhibited in the Old Testament" in <u>The Legacy of Israel</u>, planned by I. Abrahams and edited by Edwyn Bevan and Charles Singer. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), pp.5ff.

sages was full of opportunities for fraud, it was also full of opportunities for social ministry. Even through them God was at work.[88] The difference was that what was true of all the Semitic prophets was true to a greater extent of the prophets of Israel.

> However you will explain it, that Divine Spirit, which we have felt unable to conceive as absent from any Semitic prophet who truly sought after God, that Light which lighteth every man who cometh into the world, was present to an unparalleled degree with the early prophets of Israel. He came to individuals and to the nation as a whole, in events and in influences which may be summed up as the impression of the character of their national God, Jehovah: to use Biblical language, as Jehovah's spirit and power.[89]

Elsewhere Smith spoke of the history of Israel as "the record of how a nation under the guidance of God's Spirit gradually left behind their primitive barbarity and lusts of conquest",[90] calling attention to the moral distinction between Israel and her neighbours, "this indubitable progress which the nation were making while the rest of their world was morally stagnant."[91]

But it was not only the superiority of Israel over her neighbours that Smith stressed; it was also the advance of Israel's prophetic teaching over her own legalism. And this of course is at the heart of Smith's affront. For even if he had not explicitly repudiated a doctrine of verbal inspiration, his treatment of the alleged opposition between Law and Prophets would have been enough in itself to incite those who held the more traditional view. For to set one part of the Bible against another is in effect to deny its verbal inspiration and, it would appear, its unity as well. But the Bible's unity for Smith lay in the development

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[88] Twelve Prophets, vol. I, p.16. Cf. Modern Criticism, pp.111ff.

[89] Ibid., pp.17-18. (Italics are Smith's.)

[90] George Adam Smith, The War, The Nation and The Church. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), pp.18-19.

[91] Twelve Prophets, vol. I, p.19.

of its overall ethical purposes, not in a doctrine which gives the weight of divine authority equally to every part.

According to Smith a purely legal and ritual religion is primitive, a purely ethical and spiritual advanced, the highest is that revealed in and through Christ. Jeremiah therefore is to be preferred over Deuteronomy because he gives "a more explicit repetition of Hosea's text quoted by Christ: I will have mercy and not sacrifice."[92]

Jeremiah recognized that God's commands were ethical only, not legal or ritual.

> Hence it does not surprise us that before the end of his ministry Jeremiah proclaimed a New Covenant (the Deuteronomic being the old), in which there is no word of ritual or sacrifice, but man's communion with God, and God's forgiveness of man, depend on the inward knowledge, and acceptance of God's ethical revelation. This is the Covenant which Christ said was sealed in His blood.[93]

For the same reason, Smith argued, Deuteronomy is itself superior to the other strands in the Pentateuch. A comparatively small proportion of the social laws of Deuteronomy are - apart from the law of the One Altar and its consequences - concerned with matters of ritual. On the other hand the number of laws that are based on reasons of humanity is striking. "In nothing else is the superiority of Deuteronomy to other codes more conspicuous."[94] The problem with Deuteronomy, however, was that the Israelites found it much easier to rest in its legal elements than to practice its ethical ones.

> Again, the fact that the Book, while superbly insistent upon justice, holiness and humanity, lays equal emphasis on a definite ritual, with One Altar and an exclusive system of sacrifices, tempted the popular mind to a superstitious confidence in these institutions, and while

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[92] Modern Criticism, p.164.

[93] Ibid. (Italics are Smith's.)

[94] George Adam Smith, The Book of Deuteronomy in the Revised Version (Cambridge: University Press, 1918), p.xxxv.

> it was of practical advantage to have the principles of the prophets reduced to a written system, which could be enforced as public law and taught to the young - two ends on which the authors of Deuteronomy are earnestly bent - there was danger of the people coming thereby to trust rather in the letter than in the spirit of the new revelation. Both these dangers were soon realised. As Dr. A. B. Davidson has said, "Pharisaism and Deuteronomy came into the world on the same day."[95]

The proof that the Old Testament contains a Divine Revelation rested for Smith on the fact that the history of which it is the record is the history or progressive revelation of the character of God. In the Old Testament God has revealed Himself, and it is the knowledge of Him, of what He is like, that is the ground and motive for behaviour which is consistent with His Person. Smith was quick to assert however that the Old Testament conception of God is not one of mere moral force, nor is His salient characteristic one of unmitigated righteousness. The God of Old Testament faith is first of all a Person, and second, He is as effectively a God of grace as He is of justice.[96] That is - as it was the intent of this particular chapter (Lecture V) of Modern Criticism to show - the Spirit of Christ can be found throughout the Old Testament. From the thirty-second chapter of Deuteronomy through the Song of Deborah to the Psalms and David's Dirge upon Saul and Jonathan there is abundant evidence of the forgiveness, mercy and gentleness which are of the very essence of the teaching of Christ.[97] And in the teaching of the eighth-century Prophets we have the foreshadowing - in their texts on forgiveness, repentance, the imminence of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the coming of the Perfect King or Messiah - of the gospel of Jesus.[98]

There can be little doubt that Smith believed that there was revealed in the Old Testament, in the Prophets preeminently, that aspect of the

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[95] George Adam Smith, Jeremiah (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), pp.138-139.

[96] Modern Criticism, p.149.

[97] Ibid., pp.149-158.

[98] Ibid., p.158.

divine character which he called the Spirit of Christ. He gave warning however against too hastily concluding that the predictions of the Prophets can be made to fit Jesus. The Messiah of Isaiah chapter nine, for instance, can be regarded as a type of Christ only in this, that "he saves the people of God from destruction and reigns over them with justice and in the fear of God."[99] But much more to the point, in Smith's view, than the question of whether or not Christ is actually predicted by the Old Testament is the fact that the prophets themselves are illustrations - more than that really, embodiments almost - of the character of God which was finally and fully manifest in the Saviour. Jeremiah is the foremost example, and not least in his suffering for his people. Indeed in this he is a kind of statement of the essential nature of God as finally and fully revealed on the Cross.[100] In this he represents the culmination of the progress and development of the religion of the Old Testament and sets up the message of the New.

Old Testament Sacrifice And The Death Of Christ

Sacrifice figures largely in Smith's discussions of the particular topic of Law and Prophet, as it does in his discussions of the Old Testament in general. His views on the subject naturally affect his treatment of Christ's death, to which the memorialists had craved special attention be given.

There is nothing vague about Smith's position: the more ethical teaching of the prophets supersedes the sacrificial system; moreover it contradicts and nullifies it.

> Amos and Jeremiah, for example, not only deny the indispensable value of animal sacrifices for the dispensation under which they live but contradict the statements of the Law, whether

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[99] Ibid., p.161.

[100] Ibid., pp.165-168.

> deuteronomic or levitical, that God gave any commands at the time of the Exodus concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices; while other prophet voices proclaim that He takes no pleasure in these.[101]

Smith's reference probably is to Jeremiah 7.21-23 (Amos 5.25) and his comment on the passage is as uncompromising as it is interesting:

> Whether from Jeremiah or not, this is one of the most critical texts of the Old Testament because while repeating what the Prophet has already fervently accepted, that the terms of the deuteronomic Covenant were simply obedience to the ethical demands of God, it contradicts Deuteronomy and even more strongly Leviticus, in their repeated statements that in the wilderness God also commanded sacrifices. The issue is so grave that there have been attempts to evade it. None, however, can be regarded as successful.[102]

According to Smith, the sacrificial system, like much of Israel's religion, was borrowed, and although God allowed it, He neither intended nor initiated it.

> The sacrificial system of Israel is in its origins of far earlier date than the days of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt. It has so much, both of form and meaning, in common with the systems of kindred nations as to prove it to be part of the heritage naturally derived by all of them from their Semitic forefathers. And the new element brought into the traditional religion of Israel at Sinai was just that on which Jeremiah lays stress - the ethical, which in time purified the ritual of sacrifice and burnt-offering but had nothing to do with the origin of this.[103]

Smith's conclusion is that Amos and Jeremiah were correct in saying that God had never given commands regarding sacrifice. "But, of course, their interest in so saying was not historical but spiritual." The prophets' aim, Smith contended, was to destroy their generation's materialist belief that animal sacrifice was the indispensable part of religion and worship. Still, Jeremiah's way of putting it, according to Smith, involves a repudiation of the statements of Deuteronomy. "So far, then, Jeremiah

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[101] "The Teaching of the Old Testament in the Schools", p.4.

[102] Jeremiah, p.156.

[103] Ibid., p.158.

opposed the new Book of the Law."[104]

This is Smith's theory of the Old Testament overcoming itself, the theory that sees the truths of various stages as necessary to the explication of a higher truth, but not eternally true in themselves and to be cast off when the full truth is come. The value of the Temple sacrifice was that it provided an illustration: "If ethical processes must be expressed in material forms, no sacrament could be more adequate than this, which proved at once the death deserved by sin, its purification by fire, and the disappearance of its blackness and bitterness in the unfathomable mercy of Heaven."[105] But the imperfect character of the system must surely have been felt by those who cherished the loftier ideals and promises of the prophets, Smith thought. "That a man could not by himself come through the Inner Sanctuary to God, that a professional priesthood could alone enter the most secret communion with the Deity, that things not ethical intervened between the worshipper and God - such facts were bound to raise questions in the more earnest minds and to leave them unsatisfied." The reason, Smith urged, was that the Temple itself had not always been monopolised by priestly ideals: it had also been the platform of a purely ethical prophecy. "To devout Jews familiar with their Scriptures, their Sanctuary must have seemed as loud with voices hostile to sacrifice as with the bleating of animals, the murmur of the priests at their ministry, and the cries and music which accompanied the public services."[106]

Smith's meaning is obvious enough, and his point well taken, but the contrast between ethical and sacrificial is so often drawn and its implications so clear that it could not have gone un-noticed. Nor of course did it. The real subject of controversy, as at least one of Smith's

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[104] Ibid., pp.158-159.

[105] George Adam Smith, Jerusalem: The Topography, Economics and History From The Earliest Times To A.D. 70, 2 volumes (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908). vol. II, p.529.

[106] Ibid., pp.531-532.

critics recognised, was around the atonement rendered by Christ.

> Was substitutionary sacrifice, the death of the guiltless for the guilty, a Divine institution, or was it the growth of a corrupt Jewish priesthood, against whose rites the noblest prophets waged unceasing warfare? Is the whole thought of Jesus' sacrifice to be remodelled and brought into harmony with supposed prophetical and merely ethical teaching, while it must for ever be dissociated from sin-offering, and death in the room of sinners? If so, it is not only the Epistle of the Hebrews which must be sacrificed, but the whole doctrine of Paul as respects atonement, and St. John as regards propitiation, and St. Peter in his interpretation of Isaiah.[107]

There is good reason to think that the question about remodelling the thought of Jesus' sacrifice must be answered, in Smith's case, in the affirmative; for not only did Smith argue that Jeremiah's teaching concerning sacrifice differed from that of the deuteronomic and priestly codes, he also argued that the prophet was himself a sacrifice of the sort that God intended. Jeremiah, said Smith, was "the likest to Christ of all the prophets."[108] His suffering with his people Smith called "the second greatest sacrifice that Israel has offered for mankind."[109] The difference between Jeremiah and the practice he repudiated Smith described in this way: "Just there - in his keener conscience, in his hot shame for sins not his as if they were his, in his agony for his people's estrangement from God and in his own constantly wounded love - lay his real substitution, his vicarious offering for his people."[110] In this Jeremiah "foreshadowed, as far as mere man can, the sufferings of Jesus Christ for men - and this is his greatest glory as a prophet."[111] Smith concluded:

> And, therefore, in view both of the Just Wrath of the Most High and of His suffering Love, only repentance can avail, the repentance which is not the facile mood offered by many in atonement for their sins, but arduous,

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[107] Malcolm White, The Assembly's Pastoral: A Plea for a Full Testimony (Edinburgh: R. W. Hunter, 1901), p.11.

[108] Jeremiah, p.7.

[109] Ibid., p.344.

[110] Ibid., p.347.

[111] Ibid., p.346.

> rigorous and deeply sincere in its anguish. All of which carries our prophet, six centuries before Christ, came, very far into the fellowship of His sufferings.[112]

The essential difference between Smith and his antagonists was that whereas they saw Christ's death as the fulfilment of the whole history of Israel's ritual of sacrifice, Smith saw exactly the opposite. They asked how Jesus's sacrifice could be dissociated from sin-offering and death in the room of sinners. Smith said that "we must . . . remember that both the ideals of prophecy and the actual experience of the nation had accustomed the mind of Israel to the assurance of pardon apart from ritual."[113] Smith's overall view of sacrifice as he believed it to have been developed through the various stages of Israel's history is summed up in this passage from Modern Criticism. So also is the fundamental difference between himself and those who opposed him.

> The idea of vicarious suffering and substitution of the innocent for the guilty, whereby the guilty are redeemed from their sin, is to be traced not to those animal sacrifices of the Levitical ritual, but rather to the nobler source of human vicariousness and its virtue, as learned by Israel from their own experience, and idealised in the Suffering Servant of Jahweh, whose prototypes are Jeremiah and the righteous remnant. In such human instances we get the ethical truth of vicariousness: red with the blood of real life. In the animal sacrifices the expression of the idea is largely mechanical.[114]

In a series of sermons and addresses delivered in America during World War I Smith often had opportunity to speak of death in another connection. The way in which he did is instructive. It suggests that Smith believed that as Jeremiah before Christ, others, after Christ, might bring us into the fellowship of His suffering.

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[112] Ibid., pp.363-364. (Italics are Smith's.)

[113] Jerusalem, vol. II, p.532.

[114] Modern Criticism, p.170.

> The war has brought us very near the Cross, and renewed those supreme lessons of life of which the Cross is the eternal symbol. We had been forgetting that the end of sin is tragedy and death. We had been forgetting that all the evils which sin breeds require for their overthrow the uttermost men can give, and that they are defeated only by the sacrifice of what we hold dearest, even life itself - that there are powers and purposes of evil which can be encountered in no other way than by resistance unto blood. This war has brought us again face to face with these stern facts.
>
> The truth that such sacrifice is mainly vicarious, the suffering by men for sins not their own, and for the peace and freedom of others than themselves, has also been brought home to our hearts with the keenest pangs that men and women can feel. But the truth is no more than what runs through all the history of the human family on earth, and finds its most signal proof in the Cross of Christ. The moral value and influence of sacrifice lie in its vicariousness.[115]

In the same sermon he referred to those who died in the war as having been sustained by "the thought that they fought and died not for themselves or their own salvation, nor even for their country alone and their homes, but for a better future for the whole race - . . . We know that this is the spirit of Christ and His Cross."[116] In a different place but on the same theme he remarked that the war and the sacrifices will not have been in vain if they burn into our hearts the supreme lessons of the Cross: "the need of sacrifice even unto death in order to overcome evil, the moral force of vicarious suffering."[117] He even suggested that sacrifice of this sort has its eternal reward: "We cannot believe but that the deaths of our sons in such a faith for such a cause are but the entrances on higher forms of service."[118]

One of the most striking of Smith's interpretations of the Cross comes in a sermon on Psalm 121. "The Cross," he said, "was no new thing. The Cross was the putting of the Love of God, of the Blood of Christ, into the

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[115] George Adam Smith, Our Common Conscience (London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), pp.186-187.

[116] Ibid., pp.187-188.

[117] Ibid., pp.226-227.

[118] Ibid., p.228.

old fundamental pieties of the human heart, the realising by Jesus in Himself of the dearest truths about God."[119] It is to be sure, the kind of remark which requires interpretation. Still it tends to confirm the impression that, usually, Smith was not speaking about Christ's death in the same way as was the author of The Assembly's Pastoral. Even dressed as it sometimes is in orthodox language, Smith's doctrine does not look exactly like the traditional one. "If we are to get our fellows to believe in the redemptive virtue of Christ's Cross," he said in Modern Criticism, "it will be by proving to them that vicarious suffering and its ethical virtue are no arbitrary enactment of God, but natural to life and inevitable wherever sin and holiness, guilt and love, encounter and contend."[120] There is apparently nothing, in Smith's view, either judicial or ritual or of divine requirement in the death of Christ. It is simply the consequence - albeit perhaps the ultimate consequence - of the confrontation between good and evil and as such has had its "likenesses", both before, as in the case of Jeremiah, and after, as in the case of those who gave their lives in behalf of their country. Regarding the particular relationship of the Old Testament conception of sacrifice to the death of Christ, Smith's statement to the Sub-Committee was perhaps his clearest and most comprehensive.

> But once more, if the objections of the Memorialists be to the emphasis which I have placed on the vicarious sufferings of the righteous - the human sacrifices under the old dispensation - as being types of Christ's sacrifice for the sin of the world, then my answer is threefold: -
>
> First: that it is precisely these vicarious sufferings of the righteous which culminate in the most clear and direct prophecy of Jesus Christ, the fifty-third of Isaiah.
>
> Second: that it is in such human sacrifices rather than in the system of animal sacrifice that we find those ethical elements which . . . constituted the one basis of all Messianic prophecy.

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[119] George Adam Smith, Four Psalms, XXIII, XXXVI, LII, CXXI (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1896), pp.128-129.

[120] Modern Criticism, p.172.

> And third: for ourselves of this generation, who have never experienced in our religious life the value of animal sacrifice, those human sacrifices of the Old Testament, containing as they do ethical motives and effects as vital now as then, form the proper approach to our entrance into the meaning of Christ's sacrifice.[121]

Smith's Essential Christianity

Smith's view of Christianity may be described in terms of a fundamental antithesis between the ritual-legal and the ethical-spiritual. Christianity for Smith is not primarily a matter of rite or law; it is a matter of the heart and of conduct. It is, to use Smith's own language, "clear, practical and without mystery."[122] In a "Sermon before Communion", Smith warned: "Should anyone approach this means of grace with the imagination of a magic influence overbearing, or having nothing to do with, his moral faculties, he may enjoy an hour's awe or an hour's enthusiasm. But he will not have met God, nor have received the gift of life."[123] In a second communion sermon he further warned:

> The Cross, in these memorials of what happened upon it, reminds us that what sin needs is killing - crucifixion. Sin may not die at once; it may keep you fighting to kill it for a lifetime; but it is only when your heart is wholly committed against it, is wholly bent upon its destruction, that increasing victory will be granted you, and you will be spared the awful shame of passing from life without having overcome.[124]

The aim of Smith's preaching was to encourage his hearers in the struggle for purity in their lives and for righteousness in the world. He believed that men, assisted by the grace of Christ and working with their every power for things larger than themselves, could establish the

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[121] Statement to the Sub-Committee, pp.17-18.

[122] The Forgiveness of Sins, pp.128-129.

[123] Ibid., p.243.

[124] Ibid., p.262.

kingdom of God on earth and redeem their fallen characters.[125] "The progress of the race, as well as of ourselves," he said, "depends upon the thoroughness with which each of us takes up and pursues his individual warfare."[126] On the text "To him that overcometh I will give to eat of the tree of life", Smith commented:

> Christ does not say here - I give thee life that thou mayest overcome. But, overcome and the life will be thine. The responsibility, the start, the strain He leaves upon our own wills; . . . However clear His call - and all our salvation starts from that - however near His help; we have got to decide, we have got to overcome.[127]

The same emphasis is found in Smith's treatment of forgiveness:

> From at least the time of the prophets up to the end of the New Testament the element in Forgiveness which the Bible most frequently emphasises is God's new trust in the soul He has pardoned: the faith that despite our frailty, our unworthiness, our guilt; despite the mistrust and despair which the memory of our sin induces, God still trusts us, God believes us capable of doing better, God confides to us the interests and responsibilities of His work on earth. That according to the Bible is the ethical meaning of forgiveness - God's belief in us, God's hope for us, God's will to work with us, God's trust to us of services and posts in His kingdom.[128]

It comes up too where it might not be expected. Jesus' words "Believe in the Light" might have inspired a homily on, say, Jesus as Light, or faith in Christ. But Smith's treatment of the text was this:

> To believe in the Light, I say, is to use it; for after all there is no real difference between faith and work. Faith in a thing means faith in its practical effectiveness; setting to work with it, using it, rejoicing in it . . . . For believing in the Light is not having correct theories of it. But believing in the Light is allowing it to bear upon our Life, trusting the path it opens, discovering in it our duty and the heart of our brother; using it to get on with our work and to serve one another.[129]

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[125] Ibid., p.137; also The Preaching of the Old Testament to the Age, p.51.

[126] The Forgiveness of Sins, p.165.

[127] Ibid., pp.166-167. (Italics are Smith's.)

[128] Ibid., p.18.

[129] Ibid., pp.101-102.

At almost every turn the message is the same. Forgiveness means that God trusts us with the working out of His will and the building of His Kingdom in this world. But we are to be under no illusions: the work is a struggle against evil and may mean giving up our lives, as did Christ in behalf of His fellow men.[130]

This preeminently ethical and practical Christianity has as little room in it for doctrine as it does for mystery, none for dogmatism certainly. According to Smith, as we have seen, revelation is not to be regarded as the communication by supernatural means of many kinds of truth. Rather it was limited, in the case of the Hebrew writers, to "the Revelation of God Himself: and that not of the fact of His existence, which the Old Testament takes for granted, but of His ethical character and will for men."[131] It was not a revelation of God "in His metaphysical substance, for of this there is no definition in the Old Testament", but it was, again, a revelation of God "in His character and ethical purpose for all mankind."[132]

As noted earlier, these remarks are as much about the nature of revelation as they are about the relative importance of doctrine, but the two things are bound together in Smith's concept of Christian faith. What is important is not truths or laws or ritual. It is God's character and the ethical behaviour which the knowledge of that compels.

The judgement that Smith's interpretation of Christian faith is essentially ethical springs as much from his own frequent use of the word as it does from anything else. It is in order therefore to ask what he meant by it.

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[130] Our Common Conscience, pp.246-257.

[131] Modern Criticism, p.113.

[132] Ibid.

Often enough he meant simply doing the right thing rather than the wrong thing, as when he says "Lives are changed by a moment's listening to conscience, by a single and quiet inclination of the mind." Or regarding temptation:

> Yes, brothers, Temptation however much employed in the Divine Providence is not only from God; not only an examination set by the Great Master to His pupils; a problem and exercise in morals. It is a real encounter with a real foe: not a mere athletic proposed for our health and the development of our souls, but a downright battle for life, with a strong and inexorable foe.[133]

But more important to Smith than mere correct behaviour is the habitual employment of strong moral faculties in the struggle of good with evil. It is God's purpose that we should overcome sin, and we shall, but only when our hearts are wholly committed against it. Morality is a function of the will and finds expression in behaviour. That is what religion is about. The important question to ask of the Temple sacrifice in Jerusalem, therefore, is not, what did it mean, in some rather abstract sense, but what was its moral effect, what was its "beneficial influence" on the minds of the worshippers.[134] And the value of sacrifice, including Christ's, lies in its self-giving, in its conscious and intelligent, that is, in its ethical aspect.

Smith most often juxtaposed ethical with ritual, as he did in his comments on Deuteronomy: a comparatively small proportion of the social laws of Deuteronomy were concerned with ritual; the more distinctive feature of the book is the "higher ethical spirit" which pervades it, "its searching examination of moral moods and of motives and its inclusion of thoughts and desires as well as actions in its purview."[135] The contrast is interestingly drawn in Smith's description, already quoted, of how under

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[133] The Forgiveness of Sins, pp.60-61.

[134] Jerusalem, vol. II, p.530.

[135] Deuteronomy, p.xxxvii.

the old Levitical system there intervened between the worshipper and his God, "things not ethical." It is a negative definition, and not at all precise, yet it fairly sums up Smith's meaning. True religion is never religion for its own sake; it is a right heart and it issues in "the ethical service of God." It is "clear, practical and without mystery." Of Thomas Boston and the Marrow Men Smith approvingly remarked: "It was not legal obedience they demanded, but those chivalrous affections which are as the fire to cleanse national life and to enkindle in a people the ardours of sacrifice and service - . . ."[136] In the addresses which he delivered in America during World War I Smith spoke of "moral forces which have moved us","the influence of a great, a profound moral inspiration" and "the moral instincts of the race."[137] He described what the American alliance had meant to the British morally, where morally seems to mean something like morale-ly,[138] that which stirs to duty, or as he once said of true repentance, "begets an energy and enthusiasm of service."[139]

Smith moved freely between ethical, moral, spiritual and practical, using the words almost interchangeably.[140] They defined for him what is the essence of true Christianity. Concerning the obligation of re-uniting the two churches, Church of Scotland and United Free, it was in tribute that he said in 1926:

> For sixteen years I have listened in the University Chapel to sermons from ministers of both denominations without ever receiving the impression of a general distinction of doctrine or of spirit between them. Those from the one

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[136] Modern Criticism, p.247.

[137] Our Common Conscience, pp.38-39.

[138] Ibid., p.76.

[139] Ibid., p.183.

[140] Especially perhaps in his comments on sacrifice discussed above. See also Jeremiah, p.145, where Smith described Deuteronomy's essence as "spiritual and ethical."

> Church have proved just as evangelical and just as ethical as those from the other.[141]

Faith And Criticism

There would have been no near-trial at all in 1902 except for the conviction on the part of some that Smith had not only said wrong things about the Bible but that in so doing he had also and necessarily violated Christian faith and doctrine in even more fundamental ways. For heresy usually involves more than simply a mistaken opinion on a single subject. What is at stake, if the idea of heresy is taken completely seriously, is nothing less than the whole of a many-sided and unified theology which in turn is probably bound up with the heretic's relationship to God. The question for Smith, as it had been for Robertson Smith, Dods, and Bruce before him, was on what grounds could he as a believing and orthodox Protestant Christian maintain what appeared to be an assault on the primary documents? What, in other words, was the relationship between his faith and his criticism?

In their Reply the memorialists had charged Smith with failing to see that if he called into question the absolute truthfulness of the biblical record, he was barred from using that record to prove his case. It is an understandable and logical charge, and it is supported to some extent by Smith's own view of Scripture which denied equal authority to every part. Smith, however, nearly always maintained that his appeal was to Scripture, or at least to the evidence of Scripture.[142] The Bible itself was not only amenable to criticism,but because of its very nature - because it was a history of a gradual revelation of God - it sanctioned criticism.

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[141] George Adam Smith, "The Re-Union of the Two Great Scottish Churches." An address to the Aberdeen Elder's Union of the Church of Scotland and the Aberdeen United Free Church Elder's Association, 8th February, 1926 (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926), p.7.

[142] "Statement to the Sub-Committee", p.11, but throughout.

Smith's primary sanction however was Christ Himself. Christ was both the supreme Authority for the Old Testament and "its first Critic." Christ accepted, used and fed His soul on the Old Testament Scriptures, Smith argued, yet He rejected the traditional precepts by which the Jewish leaders of His time had aggravated the strictness and complexity of the Law. Christ showed Himself superior to many of the Law's formal statutes.[143] "He left no commands about sacrifice, the temple worship, or circumcision, but on the contrary, by the institution of the New Covenant, He abrogated for ever these sacraments of the Old."[144]

The same is true of the Apostles. Although the Apostles employed the Old Testament in all their preaching and held "a very strict belief in the inspiration of its text", they, like Christ, showed considerable liberty in their use of it.[145] They employed what the Church now regards as extra-canonical writings, and their appeal to "questionable traditions", as if these were of equal validity with writings which we regard as canonical, "seems to indicate that the Apostles fixed no such hard lines round the Scriptures as the Jewish, and some parts of the Christian, Church afterwards fixed."[146] They quoted Old Testament passages from the Septuagint when they were familiar with the Hebrew original and were sometimes indifferent about the exact words of the citations.[147] Moreover, "Paul upon several occasions, follows the allegorising methods of the Jewish schools of his time; in one instance he calls the literal meaning of an Old Testament passage impossible and substituted for it a metaphorical application of his own, although there can be no doubt that the literal meaning was that of the original author."[148]

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[143] Modern Criticism, pp.11-14.

[144] Ibid., p.14.

[145] Ibid., pp.14-16.

[146] Ibid., p.17.

[147] Ibid., p.18.

[148] Ibid., pp.18-19. Smith's reference here is to Paul's interpretation of Deut. 24.4 in I Cor. 9.9.

Where then, in Smith's view, does that leave the Old Testament for us, more or less loosely handled as it was by the Apostles and Christ Himself? Smith's answer is two-fold. First, the Old Testament has an "abiding value" for the life and doctrine of the Christian Church. But second, "Christ and His Apostles have nowhere bound the Church either to obedience to all its laws, or to belief in all its teaching."[149]

> For the judgement, which both He and His Apostles often emphasised, that in the Old Testament laws and institutions, ideals and tempers, there is very much which was rudimentary and therefore of transient worth and obligation, opens up the whole question of the development of revelation and justifies what is so large a part of modern criticism, - the effort, namely, to fix the historical order of the Old Testament writings and to define the stages by which the primitive revelation of God to men was carried onward and upward to its summit in Christ Himself. Besides, Christ's attitude to the Law reminds us that similar opposition exists within the Old Testament itself, between the ethical teaching of the Prophets and the priestly conceptions of religion. The determination of these two conflicting tendencies in the development of Israel's faith is another of the offices of Criticism.[150]

Smith never spelled out in any very great detail what he meant by "the permanent religious value of the Old Testament", nor did he discuss exactly how criticism would determine that which was permanent and that which was not. His point was simply that, given the nature of the Bible as the record of a religious development which culminated in Christ, it had to be criticised. Not to criticise it would be to misunderstand its fundamental character and Christ's handling of it as well.

> In short, the New Testament treatment of the Old not only bequeaths to the Church the liberty of Criticism but along many lines the need and obligation of Criticism: not only delivers us once for all from bondage to the doctrine of the literal inspiration and equal divinity of all parts of the Old Testament, but prompts every line of research and discussion along which the modern criticism has been conducted.[151]

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[149] Ibid., pp.19-20.

[150] Ibid., pp.20-21.

[151] Ibid., p.22.

All of this could be contested of course. Did Christ in fact reject parts of the Law? Was the Apostles' handling of the Old Testament in fact loose-handling? In what sense, if any, would Christ and His Apostles have seen themselves as giving to the Church a critical mandate? These are questions which must be answered by looking at the text; they are matters of biblical interpretation. And so they were viewed by Smith's antagonists. They answered him by declaring that what he said the Bible said it simply did not say.[152] The Smith case seemed to turn on questions of exegesis. There were more fundamental issues involved however, at least more philosophical ones; and they suggest that in this, as in so many such cases, there is more to it than one text versus another.

There is, first, Smith's conviction that God was in the critical movement, using it for a fuller revelation of Himself to His Church. It was no coincidence to him that Moody's Mission and the quickening of the practical use of the Bible had come at about the same time as the rise of higher criticism. In fact, the new method, in Smith's view, was the necessary complement to the revival of religion. "By those who believe in God Providence of His Church", he said "it has always been a matter of praise that the revival of the experimental study of the Scriptures in Scotland preceded that of the Critical."[153] Of William Robertson Smith

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[152]Besides Johnston's "Destructive Results", see also J. E. H. Thomson, "A Review of Professor G. A. Smith's Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament" (Stirling: James Hogg and Co., 1901); James Kerr,"The Higher Criticism: Disastrous Results" (Glasgow: Bryce and Murray, Ltd., 1903); "The Old Bible and the New: Being a Review of Prof. G. A. Smith's 'Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament'", prepared by a Committee of Ministers and Elders (London: S. W. Partridge and Co., 1901).

[153]The Life of Henry Drummond, p.129. This interesting connection between the Moody Revival and the Critical Movement is highlighted by a comment Smith made in support of his argument that "whether a Book be authentic, in the technical meaning of the word, is of small interest compared with its authenticity as vision, as truth and as the revelation of God." He said: "Even so uncompromising an opponent of Criticism as the late Mr. D. L. Moody came to see this. He said to me, and I believe wrote also to a friend, that 'it is not the authorship of the Books of the Bible that matters, but the contents'." (Modern Criticism, p.217). Smith's wife records the same incident (George Adam Smith, p.120).

and those like him he declared: "These men believed that Christ's promise of the Holy Spirit for the education of His Church was being fulfilled not less in the critical than in the experimental use of the Bible; they defended criticism on the highest grounds of faith in God and loyalty to Christ."[154] As Smith saw it, the critical method was not only proper to the Bible's nature and sanctioned by Christ, it was, in Smith's own time, ordained by the wisdom of God for the edification of His people.

There is, second, the clear influence of Darwin. In an interesting comment on an attempt by his friend Henry Drummond to reconcile Evolution and Natural Selection with the belief that God has created and sustains the world, Smith remarked, "He affirmed the principle of Development as an eternal principle, the emphasis upon which 'has been the century's noblest contribution to Theology': . . ." But, Smith claimed, "at this stage Drummond did not see how to apply the principle of development to the origins of Scripture and the story of Revelation."[155] Drummond could see nothing but an "impassable gulf between the Bible and the rest of Hebrew literature", and argued, according to Smith, that the Bible had "no cumbrous ritual, doubtful morals; nor mythical elements: . . ." Drummond, Smith regretted, as yet stood upon the ground of the older orthodoxy, with its doctrine of literal inspiration and its blind belief in the absolutely divine character of everything in the Hebrew Scripture. "Blind indeed - else how could he or that older orthodoxy in general have believed that there are no links of development between the Old Testament and the religions from the midst of which it sprang, or that in the Old Testament itself there are 'no cumbrous ritual, doubtful morals, nor mythical elements'."[156]

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[154] The Life of Henry Drummond, p.129.

[155] Ibid., p.45.

[156] Ibid., pp.45-46.

Especially illuminating is Smith's remark that "Drummond did not see how to apply the principle of development to the origins of Scripture and the story of Revelation." Development, for Smith, was apparently a kind of law to which all phenomena, including the origins of Scripture and the story of Revelation, must conform; at least it was a principle which to Smith made sense of these particular phenomena. But again, the point is that Scripture is seen in the light of this principle rather than itself enunciating the principle, although to be sure, Smith was convinced that the Scriptures gave clear evidence of it. Not that Smith twisted Scripture to get it into a particular shape; rather, once he saw theory and Book together he recognised what for him was a harmonious and edifying combination. It was the opportunity to have science and religion, scholarship and belief, united in believing criticism. In one of the last of his major sermons he put it as unequivocally as ever he had.

> With the development since Darwin of the theory of Evolution the assertion arose of new and alleged conclusive reasons for denying the faith in a Personal Creator and in consequence for fresh opposition between science and religion. It is remarkable that for the haste and bitterness of this revived antagonism between science and religion theologians have been far more to blame than scientists. For theologians of all people should not have failed to see that their Scriptures, which in their own belief are the Word of God Himself, present what is perhaps the most remarkable display of evolution which human history has to show us. From first to last the Old Testament is the tale of the gradual development, not only intellectual but moral, of the conception of God from being that of a mere national deity to that of the Father and Creator of all mankind - from being that of a God of wrath irreconcilable to that of One of infinite pity and grace, who not only judges men and guides them by His Providence and Law, but intimately argues with them about their problems and perplexities, and Himself enters into and shares all the pain of their sufferings, struggles and temptations: . . .[157]

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[157] "Science and Faith", a sermon preached before the British Association and broadcast on 9th September, 1934, The Listener of 26th September, 1934, p.529.

There is even the possibility that the concept of struggle which plays so important a role in Smith's ethical Christianity had its roots in evolutionary theory; that is, that Smith's view of faith as well as his view of the Bible had something of Darwin in it. Again, it is in a critique of Drummond that the issue comes up. "To Drummond," Smith said, "the Christian experience of faith was one not so much of struggle as of growth. One is sometimes impatient with his beautiful way of putting this."[158] The failure to recognise the necessity of struggle in the spiritual life was, as Smith saw it, one of the major defects of Drummond's Natural Law in the Spiritual World. "Christ's own spiritual life was full of moral effort, yea, to the pitch of agony; and so it has been with the lives of all the greatest saints."[159]

While Smith never denied the fact of sin, he almost always described it as temptation, "the horror of Evil in the four stages of its growth: Temptation, Delusion, Audacity, and Habit ending in Death."[160] The human tendency to the base and dishonourable is inherited - "men and women are born with the inspiration which starts these mysterious and direful changes; the fatal decadence takes place in countless lives"[161] - but it can be overcome. Not by trying to understand it however. Smith did not want an "intellectual explanation."

> Nay, the very study of sin for the purpose of acquainting ourselves with its nature, too often either intoxicates the will, or paralyzes it with despair; and it is in recoil from the whole subject that we most surely recover health to fight evil in ourselves and nerve to work for the deliverance from it of others. The practical solution of our problem is to remember how much else there is in the Universe, how much else that is utterly away from and opposed to sin. We must engross ourselves in that,

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[158] The Life of Henry Drummond, p.46.

[159] Ibid., p.144.

[160] Four Psalms, p.50.

[161] Ibid., p.54.

> we must exult in that. We must remember goodness, not only in the countless scattered instances about us, but in its infinite resource in the Power and Character of God Himself.[162]

What is at stake in the struggle is nothing less than life itself, salvation, the establishment of God's Kingdom.

> The Kingdom of God is certain, and we are immortal; but none of us is going to meet it for the first time. The Kingdom has already come. In Jesus Christ we have understood it, we have owned its obligation, we have felt its full influence. What else can be displayed in the new heavens and the new earth than the righteousness revealed in Him: the duty, the opportunity, the power to fulfil, which He is now affording! Their obligation lies in this, that they are not merely the brightest possibility in our future, but the most urgent certainty upon our present. They have proved themselves real in our individual experience; and to-day they present themselves afresh with all the power of God upon them to win and to redeem and to rebuild our fallen characters.[163]

Whether or not this struggle of men and the race to better themselves is Darwinism is a matter of conjecture, an interesting conjecture perhaps, but nowhere documented. It is clear that Darwin in one of his aspects influenced Smith's developmentalism; it is not as clear that Darwin stands behind Smith's view of moral struggle as the means of God's Kingdom. The most that can be said is that the reliance on Darwin in the one case may suggest a similar reliance in the other.

The importance of the idea of development for Smith can hardly be overemphasised. It is the philosophical basis upon which his critical work rests. In a limited sense perhaps it even precedes the authority of Christ - in the sense that Christ's role as the Old Testament's first Critic is to be understood within a context of development, Christ the fulfilment (and therefore the Critic) of all that merely, in a very rudimentary way, preceded and pointed to Him. But that much, certainly, is biblical: indeed Christ is

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[162] Ibid., pp.54-57; also pp.63-64 and 65-55.

[163] The Forgiveness of Sins, p.137.

the end of the Law. And granted, it might be put the other way around: the superiority of Christ over the conceptions and practices of the Old Dispensation is that which proves a general theory of religious evolution. That after all is what Smith was saying to the British Association. The main point, however, is that Smith's faith in Christ, his faith in God and his almost implicit faith in the truth of evolutionary theory are of a piece. The same divinely ordered process of development which led from the earliest stages of Old Testament religion to Christ its End and Critic is operative in the criticism of the present day.

Conclusion

The major problem in assessing Smith is twofold: (a) he does not say enough and (b) he almost never treats matters theologically. For instance he did not discuss the New Testament and how a critical handling of the records of the life and message of Christ might affect our understanding of Him as first critic of the Old, or whether criticism has the right to weigh and judge both testaments in exactly the same way. Nor did he discuss the allied problem of the relationship of faith to knowledge, that is, how one gets from (criticised) Scripture to the God of Scripture. Smith never professed to be a theologian and he cannot be charged with not having done everything, but the fact that he did not address the kinds of issues upon which so much of his theology ultimately depends makes him difficult to get hold of. On so many issues, the best and the worst that can be said of him is that he did not discuss it.

Yet there is unquestionably an essential and characteristic Smith: his hostility to mystery and dogma, his emphasis on practical life and the efficacy of moral resolve. And for all their lack of systematization the various elements in his scheme work together: modern criticism, sanctioned by Christ and His Apostles, allows for, rather requires, a developmental view of the Old Testament, as does the Old Testament itself. Similarly

a developmental view of the Old Testament requires a repudiation of those elements in the faith of Israel which belong to a more primitive age, namely those elements which are legal or ritual or plainly immoral by the standard of the New Covenant foreshadowed by the later prophets and culminating in the person and work of Christ. The result is a Christianity which is comprehensive and ethical and an Old Testament which is acceptable to modern man.

Only two more comments, perhaps need to be made. The first concerns Smith's view of Christian faith. It is one of the more interesting aspects of Smith's thought that while the contrast between Law and Prophet is central, that between Law and Grace is peripheral. The imbalance might be expected in a teacher and preacher whose field and quarry was the Old Testament. But is it not also rather built into his scheme and with a somewhat paradoxical result? For if the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, indeed of all true sacrifice, lies in its voluntary self-giving, in its essentially ethical and nearly imitable character, then are we not forbidden the mystery of grace, of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world? Not that Smith anywhere denied the uniqueness of Christ's death - in one place at least he affirmed it[164] - but he suggested that without too much difficulty it could be grasped, and grasped moreover in terms which were equally applicable to Jeremiah or men fighting for a righteous cause. And do not the implications of such a view tend toward a moralism which does not redeem men from the curse of the Law but simply sets the Law on a higher plane? In the very attempt to escape the Law in its ritual, especially in its ritual of sacrifice, Smith ends with a kind of ethical legalism,

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[164] In a reference to "the one Passion, the one Victory in all the history of time which can never grow old, nor lose its indispensable force for the sinful hearts of God's children; . . ." In fact Smith asserted that the "Story of this Divine Passion . . . found in these pages and these pages alone" was what gave to the Scriptures "their divine validity", not their inerrancy or that they answer to "this or that theory of inspiration." Ibid., pp.49-50.

inviting the question of the ultimate meaning, if not the necessity, of the death of Christ.[165]

The second concerns Smith's view of Scripture. It is worth noting again that Smith failed to speak directly to the specific question of the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible, the first and fundamental issue in the case against him. He never defined precisely "Word of God", nor did he dwell on the distinction which he made and upon which the memorialists were quick to seize, that, namely, between the Old Testament <u>being</u> a divine Revelation and the Old Testament <u>containing</u> a divine Revelation. Insofar as he dealt with inspiration at all, he did so only to reject the doctrine of verbal inspiration, the cause, as he saw it, of much scepticism and mental confusion. He affirmed his belief in the Bible, but he could hardly have convinced his more dogmatic brethren that his belief had a very substantial theological base.

But the things Smith was against must be seen as the other side of the things he was for: largeness, liberality, a better and a nobler life.

> How can the sense that the living God is near to our life, that He is interested in it and willing to help it, survive in us, if our life be full of petty things? Absorption in trifles, attention only to the meaner aspects of life, is killing more faith than is killed by aggressive unbelief. For if all a man sees of home be its comforts, if all he sees of religion be the outlines of his own denomination, the complexion of his preacher's doctrine, the agreeableness and taste of his fellow-worshippers - to such a man God must always seem far away, for in those things there is no call upon either mind or heart to feel God near.
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> . . . . . .
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> But if, instead of limiting ourselves to trifles, we resolutely and "with pious obstinacy" lift our eyes to the hills - whether to those great mountain tops of history which the dawn of the new heavens has already touched, periods of faith and action that signal to our more forward but lower ages the promise of His coming; or to the great essentials of human experience that at sunrise, noon and evening remain the

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[165] Some of Smith's most edifying comments on the gospel of grace come, interestingly, in his discussion of Moody's preaching, "which had its centre in the Atonement." But even Moody's message, according to Smith, was characterised primarily by its "prayerfulness and ethical temper." <u>The Life of Henry Drummond</u>, pp.56ff.

> same through all ages; or to the ideals of truth and justice; to the possibilities of human nature about us; to the stature of the highest characters within our sight; to the bulk and sweep of the people's life; to the distances of our own nation that still rise above all party dust and strife - then we shall see thresholds prepared for a divine arrival, conditions upon which we can realise God acting. Our hope will spring, an eager sentinel, as if she already heard upon them all the footfalls of His coming.[166]

It is pretty much the message of Smith throughout, rising, always eloquently, from the real life of the Old Testament to touch the living men of his own generation.

Smith regarded himself primarily as an interpreter, urging the application of ethical principles to modern life; and this could be done no better, he thought, than by "the combination of the methods of modern criticism with fervid and practical preaching from the Prophets."[167] It is not surprising then that his most enduring scholarship was technical, that the substance of his message was ethical, that the <u>cause</u> of his life centered on his attempt to vindicate the alliance of criticism and preaching. The title of his most controversial book may be, after all, the best characterisation of the man.

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[166] <u>Four Psalms</u>, pp.110-113.

[167] <u>Modern Criticism</u>, p.220.

CHAPTER TWO

"DOGMAS OF VERBAL INSPIRATION"

George Adam Smith's doctrine of Scripture was shaped as much by his reaction to traditional theories as it was by modern method. But as with the Free Church critics before him, Smith's reaction was not so much a reaction against historic views as against views which he and they felt were deviations from the doctrines of the Reformation and, even, of Westminster. William Robertson Smith, at least, argued that it was the Calvinist theologians of the two hundred years immediately preceeding who had strayed from the orthodoxy of the great Reformers and the great Confessions. His, he argued, was an attempt to return to a true Protestantism. The controversy grew out of the fact that the view entertained throughout his Church was precisely that which he often referred to and rejected as Medieval. It was the view which dominated at the inception of his Church's first and most famous Divinity Hall, New College on the Mound in Edinburgh. It was against the doctrines of their teachers and immediate predecessors that the two Smiths, Dods, Bruce, and behind them A. B. Davidson, were rebelling. To the founding fathers of the Free Church, then, one turns for a statement and defense of "dogmas of verbal inspiration."

With the Disruption of 1843 came the necessity of the newly formed Free Church of Scotland to provide its own halls for the training of ministers. Accordingly, a mere three years later, largely through the astonishing money raising labours and genius of Thomas Chalmers, the foundation stone for New College was laid by Chalmers himself on 3rd June, 1846.[1] Chalmers was the College's first Principal and Professor of Theology.

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[1]For a history of New College, including outlines of the careers of its principals and teachers, see Hugh Watt, New College, Edinburgh, A Centenary History (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1946).

He died before the Inauguration in 1851 and the most intense fighting over inspiration, but his views on Scripture were thought rigourously orthodox enough to be republished by George Smeaton (Professor of New Testament at New College from 1857-1889) in 1879 at the height of the trial of William Robertson Smith.[2]

William Cunningham (1805-1861), Chalmers's successor as Principal, was a scholar and controversialist of massive learning whose theological sympathies were never in doubt. His position was determined by his allegiance to the Westminster Confession and the Continental Reformed theologians of the seventeenth century and his considerable influence was felt throughout his tenure at New College, first as Professor of Apologetics, then as Professor of Church History.[3]

Cunningham was succeeded by Robert Candlish (1806-1873) as Principal. He was not the theologian that Cunningham was. He never actually held a Chair and his intellectual prowess was sometimes questioned even by those who, generally speaking, would have agreed with his doctrinal position overall.[4] He never wrote an extended treatise on the inspiration of Scripture, but his several lectures on the subject, together with remarks made elsewhere, show him an uncompromising proponent of traditional if

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[2]Thomas Chalmers, On the Inspiration of the Old and New Testaments, with Introductory Note by Rev. Professor Smeaton, D.D. (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1879). This pamphlet is a republication of Chapter II of Book IV of Chalmers' Theological Text Book, volumes III and IV of which are entitled On the Miraculous and Internal Evidences of the Christian Revelation, and the Authority of its Records (Glasgow: William Collins, 1835). Smeaton felt that Chalmers' chapter "will be found to supply, even in our day, though it was written before the German theory had penetrated far into the churches, a very powerful antidote to all incorrect opinions on the subject." (p.1 of the pamphlet). Chalmers' biography is the four volume Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers by his son-in-law William Hanna (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable & Co., 1852).

[3]Cunningham's official biography is Life of William Cunningham, D.D. by Robert Rainy and James Mackenzie (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1871).

[4]See for instance some of Hugh Miller's comments in John Macleod, Scottish Theology (Edinburgh: The Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1943), pp.271ff.

not theologically detailed views.[5]

James Bannerman (1807-1868) was Professor in the Second Divinity Chair (later Apologetics) in New College from 1848 to his death. His Inspiration: The Infallible Truth and Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures (1865) came to nearly six hundred pages and was hailed as the definitive defence of orthodox doctrine. In company with one or two lesser known New College theologians of the middle of the nineteenth century, Bannerman, along with Candlish and Cunningham, provides what is perhaps the best apology for traditional views.[6]

Inspiration: What It Is

There can be little doubt about where these fathers of the Free Church stood on the question of Scripture. They staunchly defended what they believed to be the position of the Reformers, and, perhaps especially, of the Confession of Faith. "The authority of the holy scripture", says section IV, Chapter I of the Standards, "dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the word of God"; and section VIII declares that "The Old Testament in Hebrew . . . and the New Testament in Greek . . . being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and providence kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentical; so as in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them."

Although the view of Scripture outlined in the Confession might well serve as a statement of what the Disruption Fathers were defending, it has recently been maintained that they probably had less in common with Calvin or the Westminster Divines than with Robert Haldane, Congregationalist, Baptist, protagonist in the Apocrypha Controversy and "Founding Father of

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[5]For Candlish's life see W. Wilson, Memorials of Robert Smith Candlish (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1880). The concluding chapter on Candlish as a theologian was written by Robert Rainy and is especially helpful.

[6]There is no biography of Bannerman.

Fundamentalism in Scotland."[7]

Haldane's position was precise and unequivocal. "The inspiration to which the Scriptures lay claim", he said, "is in the fullest sense plenary in every part of them, extending both to the ideas, and to the words in which these ideas are expressed."[8] Cunningham, who frequently cited Haldane, was of a like mind. "The Holy Spirit not merely superintended the writers so as to preserve them from error, but suggested to them the words in which the matter He communicated was to be conveyed."[9] Candlish, slightly less precise but no less dogmatic, claimed essentially the same thing. "What are we to understand by the inspiration of the Bible?", he asked in 1851.

> To this I answer generally, that I hold it to be an infallible divine guidance exercised over those who are commissioned to declare the mind of God, so as to secure that in declaring it, they do not err. What they say, or write, under this guidance, is as truly said and written by God, through them, as if their instrumentality were not used at all. God is in the fullest sense responsible for every word of it.[10]

And Bannerman, whose lengthy volume is an exhaustive if not always lucid treatment of the subject, said of the Scriptures: "In the first place, they contain a communication of truth supernaturally given to man; and

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[7]Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, The Church in Victorian Scotland, 1843-1874 (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1975), pp.251-253, This opinion is supported, interestingly, by John McLeod, Scottish Theology, pp.226ff.

[8]Robert Haldane, The Authority and Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures Considered; in opposition to the Erroneous Opinions that are Circulated on the Subject (Edinburgh: John Lindsay and Co., 1827), p.16.

[9]William Cunningham, Theological Lectures on Subjects Connected with Natural Theology, Evidences of Christianity, The Canon and Inspiration of Scripture, (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1878), p.346.

[10]R. S. Candlish, Reason and Revelation (London: T. Nelson & Sons, 1864), pp.22-23. Reason and Revelation is a collection. Its first two chapters "The Authority and Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures" and "The Infallibility of Holy Scripture" were delivered as lectures under the same titles in 1851 and 1857 respectively and both are available in pamphlet form.

in the second place, they contain that truth supernaturally transferred to human language, and therefore free from all mixture or addition or error."[11]

The belief that God not only revealed His will but superintended the recording, even the wording, of the revelation is what is usually meant by verbal inspiration. Plenary inspiration means, for all practical purposes, the same thing. At least in one place Haldane spoke of plenary or verbal inspiration, using the terms interchangeably.[12] On the other hand it might be argued, as of course it was, that while the Bible is, all of it, in some sense inspired, that does not mean that each and every word was God-given or that every part is inspired equally. But such views were exactly what the traditionalists opposed. Thus Cunningham insisted that "in fairness the word plenary should be reserved for the view which asserts the entire verbal inspiration."[13] There could be no choosing which parts of Scripture were inspired and which were not. The doctrine of plenary inspiration stood opposed to "that semi-infidelity that accepts the Bible under benefit of inventory", as a French Reformed friend in the debate put it, wherein "every one must lop off what he thinks proper!"[14] When inspiration was defined as verbal and/or plenary, it was defined in a way which was intended to leave no doubt about the fullness of its extent.[15]

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[11]James Bannerman, Inspiration: The Infallible Truth and Divine Authority of the Holy Scriptures (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1865), pp.149-150.

[12]Haldane, The Authenticity and Inspiration, p.9.

[13]Cunningham, Lectures, p.345.

[14]Count Agenor de Gasparin, The Doctrine of Plenary Inspiration, and the Errors of M. Scherer of Geneva. Translated by the Rev. John Montgomery, M.A. (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1852), pp.36-37.

[15]As we shall see, Bannerman did not hold to a view of verbal inspiration, strictly speaking. His reasons, along with his definitions, are taken up in Chapter 5. Nonetheless, what has been said here holds equally for him as it does for his co-defenders of plenary inspiration.

Inspiration: What It Is Not

The traditionalists' concern to make clear what their doctrine of inspiration is was balanced by a concern to make clear what it is not. It is not, for one thing, a theory of how the Bible was inspired. "The fact of inspiration may be proved by Divine testimony, and accepted as an ascertained article of belief", said Candlish, "while the manner of it may be neither revealed from heaven, nor within the range of discovery upon earth."[16] Cunningham concurred: "As to the way and manner in which the Spirit operated upon the minds of the authors we say nothing, because we know nothing, beyond this, that holy men wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."[17] We may and must assert that the Bible is fully inspired: further than that we cannot go. How it was inspired is a thing we know nothing about; therefore our duty is to remain silent. It was Bannerman, however, who most emphatically urged caution. What is to be especially noted in the scriptural account of inspiration, he said, is the absence of all theory or explanation as to the mode of inspiration, while plainly asserting the existence of it in the inspired man.

> The silence of Scripture on this point is as expressive and authoritative as its articulate assertions; and the refusal to define the mode of the divine agency in the matter, amounts to a practical prohibition, - forbidding us to speculate and still more to dogmatize, upon the divers steps of the process by which the result, plainly revealed, was brought about.[18]

He went even further.

> It is hardly possible to exempt from this censure any theory which goes beyond a simple statement of the effects of the divine influence as witnessed in an infallible and divine record, . . . It is hardly possible, within the limits of that which is truly supernatural, to speak when God has been silent, without falling into error.[19]

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[16] Candlish, Reason and Revelation, p.22.

[17] Cunningham, Lectures, p.355.

[18] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.243.

[19] Ibid.

The Scriptures give us every reason to declare its full inspiration but they give us none at all to speculate about the method of it.

It was not, for another thing, a doctrine which denied the human element in Scripture. The Bible, although inspired even in the language it employs, is none the less the creation of men, as varied in its contents as in its variety of authors and charged with all their genius, art, feeling, and individuality. How this can be is not discussed, for God can do whatever He likes, including using human agents in the completely free exercise of their abilities to declare His will exactly as if He had declared it Himself.

The problem of combining the totally human and the totally divine was not solved, mainly because it was not addressed, although it sometimes seems that it should have been. On one occasion, for instance, Candlish maintained that divine inspiration is "equivalent to verbal dictation, as regards the reliance which we may place on the discourse, or the document, that is the result of it",[20] while on another occasion he strenuously argued for the complete freedom of the authors.[21]

Cunningham's language was more careful and therefore invited less query. "The books of Scripture were all undoubtedly in a sense the word of man", he said, "the result in some sense of the operation of men's faculties, and exhibiting plainly and palpably the traces of the personal individuality of the authors."[22] Bannerman's view was the same. Everywhere in Scripture we are confronted with the evidence of a double authorship. The Bible is unmistakably the word of God, yet "it is marked by the human individuality that distinguishes the writing of any man who

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[20] Candlish, Reason and Revelation, p.23.

[21] Ibid., pp.78ff.

[22] Cunningham, Lectures, p.403.

thinks and writes with freedom and earnestness in his own character and without any disguise."[23]

The defenders of the older view were making no attempt to say anything about how Scripture was inspired. Talk of dictation theory on the one hand or degrees of inspiration on the other were no part of their case. They explicitly repudiated both, thus opposing those who made too little of human authorship as well as those who made too much of it.[24] Their contention was only that the Bible is inspired, inspired in a way which may be "equivalent to verbal dictation", but in a way which nevertheless does not diminish its full human-ness. The Bible for the traditionalists is at once inexplicably but patently both human and divine.

Biblical Arguments

The defense of the older view was conducted primarily along two lines, usually crossing or converging, not always differentiated but nonetheless different. The first is more or less direct, proof-textual, based on the Bible itself; the second is more or less indirect, extra-biblical, arguing not so much that verbal inspiration is true as that it is required, or that its opponents have failed to resolve issues even more basic than that of inspiration, such as the possibility of miracles.

The biblical arguments are fairly straightforward and traditional and rest for all practical purposes on the authority of Christ and His Apostles and the witness of the Bible to itself. Candlish, for instance, argued that Jesus and the Apostles recognized the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament and that there are "manifest traces" in His teaching and theirs of a design to have a volume in the New Dispensation to correspond with that in the Old; therefore we are warranted in applying

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[23] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.418.

[24] For a critique of specific views of partial inspiration or degrees of inspiration, see Cunningham, Lectures, pp.294ff.

to both Testaments whatever testimonies we find in the Bible to its plenary inspiration.[25] Cunningham maintained that although we may prove the divine origin and authority of the Old Testament by miraculous events and prophecies fulfilled, it is to the attestation of Christ and His Apostles to the divine mission of Moses and the prophets that we ultimately have recourse.[26] His argument was almost identical to Candlish's.[27] Bannerman's dependence was not primarily on proof texts, although their importance for him was plain enough. Not only does the Old Testament expressly and abundantly declare its own inspiration, he said, but the quotations from it and allusions to it in the New Testament, including those of our Lord Himself, "must equally avail to establish the fact to which they bear such distinct and unequivocal witness."[28] As for the New Testament: "The express declarations of Scripture on the point can leave no doubt that, if the Old Testament is given by inspiration, the New is of equal and coordinate authority."[29] All that Bannerman really required to justify the inference that any book of either the Old or New Testament is inspired, however, was to show that it had been written by an Apostle or a Prophet "in the Scripture sense of the word."[30] What he was asserting was not Scripture's testimony to its own inspiration but its testimony to the status of its authors. This is a slightly different approach from that of his fellow apologists and it has different implications, but it drives toward the same general conclusion: the Scriptures attest their own inspiration.

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[25] Candlish, Reason and Revelation, pp.35ff.

[26] Cunningham, Lectures, pp.273-274.

[27] For a summing up of Cunningham on this see Lectures, pp.438ff.

[28] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.311.

[29] Ibid., pp.378-379.

[30] Ibid., pp.399-400.

There were other arguments as well of course. Although Cunningham devoted a full lecture to an examination of 2 Timothy 3.16, he gave equal space to a commentary on the Confession of Faith, chapter 1, section 5. Bannerman argued at some length that the plenary is the historic view of inspiration - "Inspiration is not a word of yesterday, but as ancient as the New Testament, and in substance and essential meaning coeval with the Old"[31] - and Candlish extended his argument from the authority of Christ and the Scriptures to include, somewhat incongruously it appears, the self-authenticating character of the Bible.[32] Biblical considerations then, very broadly defined, should include arguments other than those which are exegetical in the strictest sense; but the "leading propositions" remain the witness of Christ and His Apostles, in the Bible, to itself.[33]

Other Considerations

A better, or at least a different insight into the character of the doctrine of plenary inspiration is offered by looking at the ways in which it was argued, not from the Bible, but on the basis of other considerations. Argument, in the strict sense of a proof, may not, however, be exactly the right word. That is, although they have the force of a proof and often enough the form, they attempt to demonstrate

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[31] Ibid., p.148.

[32] Candlish, Reason and Revelation, pp.40ff.

[33] That such is the case is made very clear, in Cunningham at any rate, by his commentary on the Confession, Chapter I, Section 5. After discussing at some length the internal evidence which the Bible bears of its inspiration, he closed by re-asserting the primary importance of the Bible's explicit testimony, especially Christ's testimony, in the Bible, to its own authority and inspiration (Lectures, pp.292f.). He did somewhat the same thing in his discussion of the last clause of Chapter I, Section 5 (which he took up separately), stressing that the Holy Spirit, in convincing us of the divine inspiration of Scripture, works only in and by the inspired Scripture itself (Ibid., pp.328ff.).

not so much that full inspiration is the inescapable conclusion of sound exegesis or deductions from Scripture as that any other conclusion cannot be maintained without damaging the whole fabric of Christian belief, or that it is founded on attitudes and assumptions which make it impossible from the start to arrive at a correct doctrine of inspiration or indeed of anything else. In their own way they are certainly arguments, even direct arguments, but of a different order from those which are proof-textual; and as such they reveal another aspect of the nature of the doctrine and its defense. They are nowhere formally declared; nonetheless they may be grouped together and discussed under four general heads: objective and subjective, supernatural and natural, divine authority and human reason, inspiration and other doctrines.

a. Objective And Subjective

The question of whether scriptural truth is objective is absolutely fundamental to the traditionalists' view of inspiration, and, as they urged, to Christian faith and practice as well; for if the answer is no, plenary inspiration is not only not required but biblical religion rests on mere subjectivity. So critical was the question that Bannerman began by narrowing the whole discussion to it.

> Beyond even its strictly doctrinal and religious aspects, the controversy about the inspiration of the Bible opens up the inquiry as to whether or not we have any objective standard of truth for man, apart from the revelation or the inspiration proper to his own rational and spiritual nature; and this in turn, leads directly to the questions both of the supernatural character and of the historical veracity of the Scripture volume.[34]

The fundamental question of inspiration for Bannerman was, do we really have a revelation from God? Is the Bible God's word or man's word? Between the two views, the objective and the subjective, he maintained,

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[34] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.1.

there is a profound difference:

> In the first case, it is truth coming to man from the fountain of truth, and linking man's understanding and heart to the wisdom that is from above; making him partaker of its divine fullness and infallible certainty. In the second case, it is truth coming to man from the uncertain discoveries of his own rational inquiry or spiritual insight, making his fallible nature to be its own teacher; and its erring dictates to be a revelation to himself.[35]

In his long and forceful essay the Count de Gasparin argued that the alternative to plenary inspiration is either man's reason or his religious conscience, and both, he contended, are unreliable. What he vigorously defended was the "It is written" which has an authority far beyond man's authority.[36] Candlish too wanted an "external standard or test of religious truth", a "valid objective revelation", and a "thus saith the Lord"; for if the question of the weight to be attached to the words of Scripture becomes a matter of discretion and doubt, he claimed, then on the whole problem of our relationship with God we have no expression of His mind at all.[37] The objectivity of God's revelation

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[35] Ibid., p.167.

[36] de Gasparin, The Doctrine of Plenary Inspiration, pp.87-77. I have taken the liberty to quote de Gasparin because although he was not writing in or for the "Scottish debate" as such, his view on inspiration was heartily endorsed by those who were, at least by R. S. Candlish. Gasparin's translator (Ibid., p.vi) tells us that in the General Assembly of 1851, Candlish compared Gasparin's tract to Pascal's Provincial Letters, and in the Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland for that same year (p.52), it is recorded that in response to remarks made by a deputation from the Evangelical Reformed Church of France, Dr. Candlish "expressed it as his conviction that the hope of France was to be found in the small communion with which their brethren were connected - a communion which already numbered within its ranks a man who had rendered as signal service as any one individual to the cause of the truth as it was in Jesus - he referred to Count Gasparin. After having adverted to the works of this distinguished individual, particularly a series of letters which he had published in the "Archives du Christianisme", in refutation of Professor Scherer's views on the inspiration of Holy Scripture, he said that if some of these productions were translated by some French scholar into the English language, a service would be rendered to the cause of Christ."

[37] Candlish, Reason and Revelation, pp.9-10.

is an issue of eternal significance. Moreover, as Bannerman asked, unless we can count on the Bible's being, all of it, God's word, why should we obey it?

> In a Bible in which are mingled, under the same form of speech, the infallible and the human, there will be, in the first place, no divine certainty to satisfy the understanding, and on which the faith of a believer may rest as the one foundation of God's veracity. And in the second place, in such a record, speaking sometimes with the voice of God and sometimes with that of man, and yet, with no distinction, of voice, to tell what is God's and what is man's, there will be no supreme authority making manifest its power and right to rule the judgements of our reason, and to bind its obligations on the conscience.[38]

The issue of objective versus subjective is fundamentally whether or not the Bible can be trusted as being from God. Upon our view of inspiration, therefore, depends our religious certainty.

b. Supernatural And Natural

The distinction between supernatural and natural in the minds of the traditionalists was so much a part of the distinction between objective and subjective as to be almost indistinguishable from it. Because of its somewhat different ramifications, however, especially for the doctrine of inspiration considered devotionally or religiously, it merits a brief discussion of its own.

Nearly all modern theories of inspiration, Bannerman averred, are an attempt to explain away the miracles of the Bible. It was only when men began to deny the power of God in the passage of the Red Sea or the miracle of the manna in the desert that it became necessary to look for theories which would explain these events, either partially or wholly, on natural principles. So it was with inspiration. As long as the supernatural was unreservedly admitted there was no need to explain how

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[38] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.251.

or in what degree the Scriptures were inspired, or to deny that they were inspired at all. Even the debate about subjective and objective is at base the debate about natural and supernatural.

> Under whatever forms of new and unfamiliar language such a question may be stated, it is in substance nothing but the old and well-worn debate as to the reality or not of a proper and true revelation; it is the controversy as to whether or not God has, in days past, and on various occasions, supernaturally broken the silence of heaven, and sent His word unto men.[39]

Those who are not prepared to admit miracle in the revelation will not be prepared to admit miracle in the record; conversely, those who believe the Bible when it tells them of supernatural events will not object to supernatural inspiration on the ground that miracles do not happen.[40] The way we see the Scriptures may well reflect the way we see everything else.

c. Divine Authority And Human Reason

Cunningham claimed that the foundations of German rationalism were a denial of the supernatural character of God's revelation and an assertion of the supremacy of human reason.[41] Cunningham and the others reversed the order and the priorities. Throughout their remarks there are references to man's "feeble reason", the "uncertain discoveries of his own rational inquiry", and his "fallible nature" with its "erring dictates." The authoritative word of Almighty God is juxtaposed with the mere word of men and the traditionalists were ready to stand on the former, at the expense, if need be, of their right to question. Candlish's statement is almost a credo.

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[39] Ibid., pp.146-147.

[40] Ibid., p.65.

[41] Cunningham, Lectures, p.249.

> I may have to admit that there are difficulties in connection with these precious remains which I have not, in this remote age and country, the means of solving. But I for one will be no maker of difficulties; no eager finder of them; nor will I make too much of them when they force themselves upon me. I will not refuse a probable, or even a possible, explanation of them, merely because it does not clear up all, and make all certain. And most assuredly, even in a desperate case, I shall consider it infinitely more probable that there is some mistake on my part, some error in my way of looking at the matter; that the puzzle I am in is owing to my distance from the writers, and that a few simple words from them would at once remove it; and will remove it when I meet them in a better world; than that either they should have undertaken, or God should have permitted them to handle, as his authorized ambassadors, and the authoritative teachers of his church in all ages, the deep things of his righteousness and peace, in any other words than those which his own Holy Spirit sanctioned and approved.[42]

There are things in Scripture and about Scripture, they argued, which only pride could tempt us to question. It is wiser and humbler to accept that the discrepancies we see in God's Word are products of our own spiritual or intellectual myopia. Any other approach to the Bible is fraught with danger. As for himself, Gasparin confessed that too much criticism and German theology had led him into spiritual trouble and drought: "The Bible had lost its savour; its divine virtue, that direct and unanswerable proof of its own inspiration; - life had disappeared under the scalpel."[43] As for his opponent: "We understand too well the disease under which M. Scherer is sinking. What would we not give to make him accept the remedy, - to get him to shut up his theological library for a few months, and to read over his Bible like an illiterate man or a child."[44]

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[42] Candlish, Reason and Revelation, p.71.

[43] Gasparin, The Doctrine of Plenary Inspiration, p.59.

[44] Ibid., p.59.

Gasparin did not deny the need for honest scholarship. Like his fellows he affirmed it. It is absolutely important, he maintained, to admit doubts and try to resolve them, for such a procedure gives confidence to those who have similar difficulties.[45] But our doubts must be set against a background of belief.

> Without rejecting science, - without supposing ourselves free from the necessity of studying points of difficulty, - without ceasing to attach a high value to the reconciliation of the slightest apparent contradiction, we derive from a higher source, from the very lips of the Saviour, the belief which affords us peace. After him, and with him, we say, "It is written."[46]

The traditionalists opposed a wrong attitude as much as a wrong view of inspiration. In their view, the two tend to go hand in hand and together they have serious consequences. Between the man who comes to the Bible believing that it is only more or less of God and the man who accepts it in its every statement as God's word there is a vast difference in spirit. Even if both should come to the same conclusions, Bannerman claimed, even in matters of doctrine, the one has come to them because he "has searched amid errors, and laid hold on truth", while the other has "received the doctrines of the Bible, not because he has discovered their truth for himself, but because it is the word of God; . . ." The first has merely discovered his own truth, the second has received it from above. In the one instance it is faith in man, in the other it is faith in God.[47] Faith, in a sense, is determined by one's doctrine of inspiration. Similarly, one's doctrine of inspiration is determined by one's faith, because in either case what is involved is the relationship between divine authority and human reason. The traditionalists insisted that a proper and edifying view of God and His word meant not putting too much confidence in the flesh.

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[45] Ibid., p.85.

[46] Ibid., p.86.

[47] Bannerman, Inspiration, pp.241-243.

d. Inspiration And Other Doctrines

If, as the traditionalists argued, one's view of inspiration in an important sense determined one's faith, it no less determined one's doctrine. The Bible is the source of every doctrine; weaken its authority and you weaken them all. It is not a question of salvation directly - but it is indirectly. "The doctrine of inspiration is the doctrine of doctrines", Gasparin declared, "not because a man is saved by the believing of it, but because he cannot reject it and maintain the truth which saves."[48]

Gasparin's essay was written in part to oppose the views of Edmond Scherer. Scherer had resigned his post in the Theological Seminary in Geneva because, as Gasparin's translator related it, he had changed his opinion with respect to Scripture and was now contending that "the inspiration of the writers of the Bible differed not from that which every believer is entitled to expect - that the Bible is only inspired in so far as it teaches religious truth, and that on other points it may be found to contain errors; . . ."[49] Moreover, Scherer had asserted, Jesus "does not teach us a system of doctrine; he manifests to us a pardoning God. That which is essential in him is his person."[50] But we cannot have the person of Christ, Gasparin replied, without a doctrine of Christ, and what we know of Christ, is it not through the Scriptures that we know it?[51] The same is true of the work of Christ. Scherer's views of the Atonement had gone from that of "external salvation", salvation by substitution, to that of the "internal method", which Gasparin maintained is nothing other than salvation by works.[52]

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[48] Gasparin, The Doctrine of Plenary Inspiration, pp.17-18.

[49] Ibid., pp.v-vi.

[50] Ibid., pp.18-19.

[51] Ibid., pp.12-13.

[52] Ibid., pp.13-15.

Gasparin's conclusion was this:

> We have seen that M. Scherer has not been able to reject the inspiration of the Bible, and to preserve intact the truths which the Bible reveals. It is in no man's power to fling away the case without losing its contents, to break the vessel without spilling the liquour. For all times and countries, the question of form or method will be the great question: to settle it, is to settle at the same time the question of substance or belief.[53]

John Montgomery, who translated and wrote the preface to Gasparin's work, claimed that doctrinal truths work together in a harmonious whole. It is no wonder then that "low views upon one point should usually be accompanied with low views upon other points, and that the downward tendency once manifested anywhere should soon come to be manifested everywhere." To defend one part is therefore to defend the whole: "the vindication of one doctrine facilitates the vindication of every other."[54] This domino principle, as it might be called, could be established from history, Cunningham maintained. The history of the church shows that men who held defective views of inspiration have very often held erroneous views of the leading and peculiar doctrines of Christianity. The effect moreover was reciprocal,

> as if a tendency to indulge in their own speculations upon theological subjects, without due deference to the authority of God's revelation, led them to cherish notions about the inspiration of Scripture, which left room for such speculations as they were disposed to indulge in; and then these defective views of inspiration, practically applied and acted on, confirmed them in their erroneous views of Christian doctrine, and contributed to lead them further astray.[55]

Then, in a passage which is as interesting as it is relevant, Cunningham went on to chart a parallelism between views of inspiration and general doctrinal soundness, "a parallelism manifest enough through all the

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[53] Ibid., pp.17-18.

[54] Ibid., pp.iii-iv.

[55] Cunningham, Lectures, pp.406-407.

gradations of error, from German Rationalism, which is infidelity, up through Socinianism, Pelagianism, Arminianism, to truth, as exhibited in the Calvinism of the word of God."[56]

The Calvinism of the word of God - it is a pregnant phrase. And the whole passage sheds considerable light on the nature of the connection, amounting almost to an identification in Cunningham's mind, between a right doctrine of inspiration and truth, truth conceived not only theologically but Calvinistically. But Cunningham was perhaps only giving more pointed expression to what all the traditionalists were urging, namely that the doctrine of inspiration is not an isolated issue, kept alive, as it were, by the sheer inquisitiveness of theologians who have nothing more to occupy their restless intellects. If a right view of inspiration is not essential to the soul's salvation, it is nonetheless fundamental to doctrines that are.

Heart And Head

None of the four ways, just described, of putting the case for inspiration is purely or even primarily academic. It seems to be taken for granted that each will be most convincing when it is most practical or pious: "What sort of faith can we rest on an authority which is merely subjective?", "Do not doubts about the full inspiration of Scripture simply reflect a tendency to doubt that God has supernaturally revealed Himself at all?", "Is there not a difference in attitude as well as presuppositions between one who sits in judgement on the Bible and one who allows himself to be judged by it?", "How can we reject the doctrine of inspiration without also rejecting the truth which saves?" The real thrust of the arguments, except perhaps in the case of the last, is primarily religious.

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[56] Ibid., p.407.

This element in the older view of inspiration, this appeal to experience and conviction, to common sense and the need for certainty, might be seen as another, a fifth indirect argument in the defense of plenary inspiration. It is so much a part of the other four however that it can hardly be separated out. It is the defense argued pragmatically. Cunningham's is a fair summing-up of the whole case.

> What is necessary practically, and without entering into useless speculations upon this subject, is, that men have such a conviction of the divine origin and authority of the sacred Scriptures, resting upon grounds of the validity of which they are satisfied, as frees them from all doubt and anxiety, as is sufficient to preserve them from the danger of falling into infidelity; and especially, and above all, as leads them to study aright the Scripture itself, the word of God, and to submit implicitly to its guidance.[57]

Only a sure conviction about the authority of Scripture, built upon a correct view of inspiration, will cripple doubt and compel obedience. Theology and devotion are bound together. If anything, it is doctrine's effect more than its truth that counts, although it would be a serious mistake to represent the Free Church Fathers as less than concerned about truth for its own sake, or to imagine them less than eminently capable in its defense. Nonetheless, it remains one of the salient features of the older view that it never pretended to divorce heart from head. The two live in a kind of spiritual symbiosis in which correct doctrine nourishes godliness, but in which godliness has opened the eyes to see clearly in the first place. The intimacy of the relationship may be illustrated by referring to two related and fairly prominent themes. The first has to do with the effects of a right view of inspiration, the second with the perversity in which it is believed wrong views are conceived.

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[57] Ibid., p.324.

Cunningham claimed that any doctrine of Scripture short of full inspiration, even a doctrine which claims complete, but not complete verbal, inspiration, "is not so well fitted to produce and to preserve a profound impression of their sacredness, and a habitual and unreserved submission to their dictates, as the view which we believe to be indicated by the Bible itself."[58] The essential thing about a particular doctrine is the effect it has on men's lives. Cunningham granted that if men, having simply ascertained the meaning of Scripture statements, were to submit implicitly to them, "the practical mischief of the deficiency or error of their opinion in denying plenary verbal inspiration might not be very great; . . ."[59] But the tendency of human nature is such that any doctrine which does not guarantee plenary verbal inspiration "may make them more ready to indulge in some of those methods of escaping from the full impression of the fair meaning of its statements which have been so largely practised in every age."[60]

The power of a right doctrine of inspiration to produce godliness is a more prominent theme in Cunningham's apology than it is in the others', but it is not unique to his. Bannerman, it will be remembered, argued at some length that the man who fancied he had discovered God's truth by searching amid errors paid homage not to God but to himself. The effects of the doctrine are not then a minor consideration. They are relevant to both time and eternity.

There is more to it, however. The traditionalists were not only arguing that wrong views tend to produce wrong belief - as if to warn their hearers and readers of the spiritual consequences of a slovenly attitude to theological endeavor. They were also saying that wrong views

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[58] Ibid., p.408.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

constitute or evidence a wrong spirit; in other words that godliness in some sense is manifested in sound doctrine, that the man whose views are wrong is probably wrong in heart as well as head.

It was Cunningham's contention, for instance, that low views of Scripture have commonly been taken up by those whose motive was precisely to avoid the binding authority of God's word to obey it.[61] Haldane maintained that the only possible cause for difficulty in the issue of verbal inspiration is lack of simplicity, "a profane desire to penetrate into the manner of the Divine operation on the mind of man in the communication of revealed truth."[62] For the truth of the Old Testament in particular, he claimed, there is a body of evidence "to which nothing but the deep corruption of the human heart, and the enmity of the carnal mind against God, could render any one insensible."[63] His harshest language, though, was reserved for those who tamper with the canon, those who feel that some books, in this case Esther or The Song of Solomon, do not belong. The authority of Jesus Christ has given sanction to every book in the Jewish canon, he declared, "and blasphemy is written on the forehead of that theory that alleges imperfection, error, or sin, in any book in that sacred collection."[64]

It must be conceded that the intemperateness of Haldane's language finds an echo only perhaps in Cunningham who referred to him frequently. It cannot be fairly contended that the arguments of all the traditionalists share the same uncompromising spirit. Still it points up the vital connection which they believe to obtain between the intellectual and the spiritual. There is no rift between the academic and the religious. Doctrine affects devotion as devotion affects doctrine and both must be taken into any complete account of inspiration.

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[61] Ibid.

[62] Haldane, The Authenticity and Inspiration, p.110.

[63] Ibid., p.41.

[64] Ibid., p.64.

Revelation And The Nature Of Christian Belief

The central importance of the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration must be seen, however, in the light of the conception which gives point to every argument in its defense, namely the conception of the essential nature of Christian belief and the view of revelation with which it was almost always bound up. Belief has to do with the apprehension of truths, not with intuition or feeling, or with what Candlish described as "a subtle sort of refined mysticism."[65] Truth is truth presented to the mind. That is why it must be objective, guaranteed supernatural by a "proper and true revelation", and why the whole system - for truths, having one inspired source, interlock in a system of truth - is only as stable as its foundation. What is involved in the question of inspiration is the much larger question of how we know God, and the traditionalists were answering that we know Him by what He has told us of Himself in His word. Believing means believing doctrines.

"Doctrine is truth, revealed truth", said Gasparin. "He who believes in God, admits a doctrine; he who acknowledges himself a sinner, admits a doctrine . . . . It is impossible to think of the things which are above without dealing in the doctrinal; it is impossible to go to one's knees without dealing in the doctrinal."[66] And as for Scherer's remark that Christ simply declares to us pardon, not a system of beliefs:

> For our own part, we wish a dogmatism as <u>narrow</u> as that of the Bible; we think no dogmatic prepossessions excessive which do not exceed (and that is impossible) those of Jesus Christ and his apostles. We are assured that the Lord came to declare doctrine; and far from opposing God's forgiveness to doctrine, we believe that God's forgiveness is a doctrine.[67]

Gasparin's language is perhaps exaggerated but his view is not substantially different from Cunningham's. In the first of his <u>Theological</u>

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[65] Candlish, <u>Reason and Revelation</u>, p.12.

[66] Gasparin, <u>The Doctrine of Plenary Inspiration</u>, p.34. (Italics are Gasparin's).

[67] <u>Ibid</u>., p.33.

Lectures, Cunningham reminded his students that they were entering upon the study of the truth as it is found in the Bible. And as for definitions of religion and theology, he said, if we speak of them "in their objective sense, rather than their subjective", we may say that they both mean "that system of truths derived from the word of God which constitute Christianity."[68] On the other hand, "Theology used subjectively, and distinguished from religion, is descriptive of a full, comprehensive, well-digested knowledge of God and of divine things, such as may qualify for the instruction of our fellowmen."[69] But either way, the accent is clearly on that which can be taught.

Cunningham admitted that men may know nothing of God, even though they are learned, after a fashion, in theology; but such men, having "never submitted their understanding and their hearts to the influence and authority of the Bible as a divine revelation . . . cannot with propriety be said to know God or Christian theology, and are not properly entitled to the name of theologians."[70] There is more to it than mere knowing: there is obedience. But knowing God begins with knowing the Bible. The emphasis is plain in Cunningham's remarks on the training of ministers.

> If it be the great duty of the ministers of the gospel to explain and open up the Word of God in its true meaning and real import for the salvation of men, then it is manifest that their theological education should be principally directed to these two objects - first, that they acquire that information, form these habits, and be impressed with these general views and principles which may constrain them ever after to devote their principal attention to the study of God's Word, and may afford them the best assistance in attaining most speedily and most certainly to the correct knowledge of the meaning of its statements; and second, that they become intelligently and accurately acquainted on scriptural grounds with those fundamental doctrines of revelation

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[68] Cunningham, Lectures, p.8.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid., p.10.

> which ought to pervade all their efforts to instruct their fellow-men, as bearing most directly and immediately upon the salvation of sinners, and which, when distinctly perceived, and firmly held, and faithfully applied, will preserve them from radical or fundamental error in the interpretation of any portion of Scripture.[71]

The job of the minister is principally to explain the word of God; therefore he must understand its meaning as fully and exactly as possible, for upon his instruction depends the cure of souls.

Cunningham's phrase "doctrines of revelation" suggests a very great deal; and while it cannot be taken for granted that by it he must have also meant "revelations of doctrine", there is evidence to indicate that doctrine, broadly defined (as he himself had defined it), was the constituent element in his and many of his colleagues' view of revelation. Throughout the Lectures Cunningham spoke of God's revelation as being a revelation of His mind or His will.[72] What God has revealed are His thoughts; and since thoughts are expressed in words, getting God's thoughts right requires getting His words right. "God has given us no certain means of knowing his will but from his word", Cunningham proclaimed, "and no certain means of knowing the meaning of his word, but from an investigation of the actual statements which it contains."[73] Whatever else we may do in preparing to expound the Scriptures we must always come back to the actual words of Scripture: "There is nothing above or beyond them, there is nothing beside or apart from them, that conveys to us authentically or authoritatively the will of God for our salvation. The written word must be at once our starting point and our goal; . . ."[74]

The practical implications of such a view are immediate and profound, for exegesis in particular. Alexander Black, first Professor of New

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[71] Ibid., p.15.

[72] See Lecture XXI for an excellent example of the use of such language.

[73] Cunningham, Lectures, p.582.

[74] Ibid.

Testament at New College, made the point in his Inaugural Lecture.

> The great design of exegetical theology, or the study of the Scriptures in the original form, is that the mind of the student, and eventual instructor of the people in the knowledge of divine truth, may be brought into a state of close and habitual contact with the minds of the inspired writers themselves, in the first instance, by the medium of the identical expressions in which the revelation of the will of God was directly imparted to their minds, and by them committed to writing in that very form in which they received it, and in which it has been transmitted to ourselves.[75]

In order for the student to do this, there are two things of which he must have evidence of the most satisfactory nature: first, that the words of the Scriptures which he uses are exactly identical to those committed to writing by the men who received them from above, and second, that the meanings of those words, as he understands them, is the same as that understood by those who used them in the first instance.[76] A guarantee that the words are correct is basic to the whole exegetical enterprise and that guarantee is given by the doctrine of plenary inspiration. It constitutes, in Black's language, "the very basis of sound theological study."[77]

Indeed, Black, who was by no means unlearned or naive, was almost compulsive about the importance of the actual, original words of Scripture.

> On every occasion, in whatever circumstances, when he would direct his attention to any portion of the original Divine records, and when he forms the most distinct conception of the words as exhibited to the eye, and the sounds as addressed to the ear, and the meaning as presented to the mind, let him remember that these are the very words and sounds by which that meaning was

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[75] Alexander Black, Inauguration of the New College of the Free Church, Edinburgh, with Introductory Lectures on Theology, Philosophy, and Natural Science (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1851), p.145.

[76] Ibid., p.148.

[77] Ibid., pp.146ff.

> primarily imparted by the Divine Spirit to the minds of the inspired men to whom the communication was made, that by them it might be conveyed to the minds of others in the very form in which they had themselves received it; . . .[78]

He even went so far as to encourage in ministers a thorough appreciation for spoken Hebrew, in order that they might more feelingly read the Scriptures in public - because the very sounds of the words were the same as those which were heard by God and the holy men of old in their converse with one another.

> The very sounds, therefore, can still be revived and expressed, in which Abraham communed with God, and received the Divine intimations of His will - the very sounds that were addressed to Moses from the burning bush, and the words of the law pronounced in the hearing of the people amidst the solemnities and terrors of Mount Sinai - the very sounds in which Moses spoke to his countrymen in all his intercourse with them, and in which the whole succession of prophetical men delivered the messages with which they were charged.[79]

Defined in this way, revelation is synonymous with, and therefore a guarantee of verbal plenary inspiration. For if God revealed His will in words and those words were exactly the same words which were heard and in which it was recorded, then in the nature of the case they are inspired words and the Bible is an inspired book. Black put the case very clearly when he said: "it is by words that we engage in the exercise of communion with God; it was by words that God communicated the knowledge of His will to man in the respective languages that He was pleased to employ for this purpose."[80] Cunningham was making virtually the same point when he said that the Holy Spirit had not merely

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[78]Alexander Black, "The Exegetical Study of the Original Scriptures Considered in Connexion with the Training of Theological Students", in a letter to the Rev. Thomas McCrie, Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: Shepherd and Elliot, 1856), p.18.

[79]Ibid., p.57.

[80]Ibid., p.7.

superintended the writers so as to preserve them from error but had suggested the words in which the matter he had communicated to them was to be conveyed. No distinction was made, because none was needed, between revelation and inspiration.

But behind this view of Scripture and tied to it was the belief (a) that the nature of the divine/human intercourse was exactly the same for the ancient Hebrew as it is for us and (b) that that intercourse was intellectual, mediated by language. As Black said concerning exegesis, or what he called Explanatory Criticism:

> The words of language, that require for unfolding their meaning the nicest application of the principles of inductive investigation, are those that relate to the operations of the mind and the expression of moral and abstract conceptions. But the operations of the Hebrew mind must have been of the same general description with those of the human mind at the present day, and in every variety of modifying circumstances; and that they were conducted under the influence of the ordinary laws of human thought is evident, by comparing the provision afforded by the Hebrew language for giving expression to them with the similar provision in other languages. This substantial identity of languages, amidst all the varieties of modification presented by the varieties of different languages, is an irrefragable argument furnished by philology confirmatory of the result of physiological researches, in proof of the substantial identity of human nature and the descent of the whole human family from one common origin.[81]

This is an interesting comment on a lot of things - anthropology, linguistics, philology and the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis. But mostly it is a statement concerning what Black at least believed to be the connection between words and thought and revelation, and the communion of God with men.

The same kind of thinking supported Systematic Theology. The Scriptures are a revelation from God, declared James Buchanan at the inauguration, "designed for the instruction, and adapted to the capacities, of the human mind." Just as we organize the parts of any other complex

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[81] Ibid., p.22.

subject for the better understanding of it, so should we organise the Scriptures, for "the contents of Scripture, however miscellaneous, afford the materials for a complete system of religious truth; and its topics are so related to each other, as to fall naturally and necessarily into the order of a regular scheme."[82] Because Christianity is essentially a matter of doctrine, the Bible cannot be a mere miscellany. We apprehend God cognitively and our minds require system. Behind the statements of Scripture is the mind of God, also working, as it were, systematically. It is therefore proper to compare Scripture with Scripture so as to obtain "a comprehensive knowledge of the whole counsel of God."[83]

One final illustration. Church History for Cunningham was not primarily names, dates and places. His course, he suggested, "might with more propriety, be designated Historical and Polemical Theology, as distinguished from, and supplementary to, Systematic Theology."[84] He had no intention, he told his students, of confining himself to a merely historical treatment of the theological discussions which had agitated the church; rather he intended to survey them with the lamp of divine truth, "to bring them into comparison with the light of God's word, and to endeavor to guide you to a right estimate of the accordance or discordance between the views which have been broached at different times, and have gained currency and influence, and the unerring standard of the word of God."[85] History as such was of very secondary importance, even history of dogma. What was wanted was history of dogma scrutinized with reference to Scripture. Church History was also a theological enterprise, a means of clarifying and propounding doctrine.

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[82] Inauguration of the New College, Introductory Lectures, pp.87-88.

[83] Ibid., pp.90-91. Buchanan was Professor of Divinity (later Systematic Theology) from 1848-1868.

[84] Ibid., p.64.

[85] Ibid., p.68.

It would be simplistic and unfair to suggest that saving faith was seen by the older school as nothing more than bare assent to propositions. Cunningham clearly made obedience to God's word more important than the mere understanding of it. But the emphasis on doctrine throughout is unmistakeable, and any character sketch easily tends to become a caricature, largely because the traditionalists' language does not often enough provide a hedge against it. Divine truth is the operative idea and the centrality of it in the older view of Christian belief is what makes a correct doctrine of inspiration both important and necessary. Everything depends upon it. Systematic theology depends upon exegetical theology which in its turn depends upon, if it is not the same as, the study of the words of the text themselves. And since revelation is a revelation of God's thoughts, it is all pretty nearly an exact science, requiring exact language guaranteed to [redacted] express EXACTLY the divine mind by a doctrine of plenary inspiration.

Theology And The Bible

Theology, as has been suggested, in the minds of the advocates of plenary inspiration, was an exercise not too far removed from exegesis. As Cunningham had said, religion and theology may be defined as "that system of truths derived from the word of God which constitutes Christianity." In one place in fact he spoke of "the study of Christian theology, or of the word of God", making the study of Scripture and of theology practically the same thing.[86] Indeed between theology, the study of Scripture and the exercise of religion there was for Cunningham very little difference. Real religion consists in the knowledge and practice of the will of God, His will is expressed in the Scriptures, and the study of the Scriptures is what constitutes theology. A religious man is a man who knows God

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[86] Cunningham, Lectures, p.5.

through the Scripture; as such he is also a theologian of sorts. The difference between the ordinary believer and the minister is that the nature and extent of the latter's training qualifies him to instruct his fellowmen and so to more justifiably bear the name of theologian.[87] These relationships Cunningham spelled out in his introductory lecture to his students. He assumed, he said, that they had already given some attention to the study of God's word, that they had been taught by the Spirit so as to have been led into such a knowledge of God's oracles as to "choose God as your portion, to embrace Christ as your Saviour, and to devote yourselves to his service." But he also assumed that they had not given a great deal of attention to the study of the word of God in the original languages or thought a great deal about the principles that ought to guide them in the interpretation of it, "that you have not yet spent much time in comparing the different statements of God's word with each other, and trying to form clear and correct conceptions of the general truths which, as a whole, it teaches upon all the various and infinitely important subjects with respect to which it gives us information."[88]

> It is assumed that while you have not yet had time to give much attention to such exercises as these, in which the study of Christian theology essentially consists, neither have you had much opportunity of making use, for the attainment of the ends to be effected by these exercises, of the assistance to be derived in this work from a knowledge of the labours of those who have brought the largest measure of natural talents, acquired learning, and spiritual discernment, to bear upon the investigation of the character, meaning, and contents of sacred Scriptures. And if these assumptions are correct, then if follows that you do not yet possess that full, clear, and thorough knowledge of the doctrines of Christian theology and of the grounds on which they rest, that is needful, in order to explain the word of God to others, or to assist them in the explanation and application of it; . . . You may be, I trust you are, Christians, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, but you are not theologians.

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[87] Ibid., pp.5-8. especially p.8.

[88] Ibid., pp.6-7.

> You may have been made wise unto your own salvation, but you have yet a great deal to learn, both from the agency of the Holy Spirit through the written word, and also from the writings of men, before you become qualified to be ministers of the New Testament. [89]

Clearly, from Cunningham's point of view, theology was the name given to the disciplines by which certain men, by virtue of their special training, were enabled to draw from the Bible the general truths, i.e. the doctrines, which it taught, and in their turn to teach those doctrines to others. To be a minister was to be a theologian and to be a theologian was to be a minister of the New Testament. Theology differed from Exegesis in that Theology, properly termed Systematic Theology, was concerned with organizing the statements of Scripture, as opposed to the preliminary task of finding out exactly what the statements meant. For as Buchanan had said, the contents of Scripture afford the materials for a complete system of religious truth and its topics are so related to each other as to fall naturally and necessarily into the order of a regular scheme. In the same connection it is probably not insignificant that Alexander Black, although he spoke at the Inauguration of New College as Professor of Exegetical Theology, was, at the same time, Professor of New Testament, there being apparently no distinction between the two disciplines.[90] Indeed the title Exegetical Theology itself indicates the intimacy of the relationship between exegesis and theology. In any case, what is clear is that the Bible was conceived as in some sense a book of theology: the task of the Exegetical Theologian was to elucidate the exact meaning of Scripture statements from a careful look at the exact language in which they were cast in the original; the task of the Systematic Theologian was then to organise those statements into the regular scheme into which they naturally fall. The study of the Bible was in itself the study of Theology.

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[89] Ibid., p.7.

[90] Hugh Watt lists Black as Professor of New Testament, 1844-57, in his History of New College, Edinburgh: A Centerary History (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1946), p.242.

Conclusion

The older school considered themselves the upholders, not only of the right doctrine of inspiration, but of doctrine in general. They resisted any attempt to ground Christianity in "blind feelings." They opposed wrong views of the Bible mainly, but also and at the same time the wrong conception of faith with which they believed those views were almost always bound up in one form of evil combination or another.

Generally speaking the enemy was any view which held that Scripture was fallible or errant or otherwise less than completely authoritative. But it was not the out and out attackers of Scripture who were the primary objects of traditionalist scorn. It was those who, while professing to be its defenders, effectually undermined its authority. For one of the ways by which the Bible can be defended against charges of containing error and therefore of not being inspired is to argue that it is inspired in parts or in degrees, to argue that is, that there may be errors in it but that that is no proof against its inspiration - because those parts in which errors occur were never delivered as being fully inspired in the first place. This the traditionalists denied. Those who defended the Bible in this way, as Bannerman described them,

> admitted the existence of inaccuracies and imperfections in the record, inconsistent with the notion of an equal supernatural perfection in it all; and in order to retain the idea of inspiration side by side with the admitted errors, they were forced to have recourse to the theory of an inspiration varying in degree in different portions of Scripture, and allowing of human imperfections and fallibility in some.[91]

Such was the erronous view held, with more or less modification, by the likes of Lowth and Doddridge in the eighteenth century and Hill, Pye Smith, and Henderson in the nineteenth.[92] These did not deny supernatural

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[91] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.140.

[92] Ibid., p.141.

inspiration altogether; indeed, according to Bannerman, "they took for granted that, when inspiration was present in its integrity, error could not be; and that it was only by the limitation or exclusion of the supernatural element they could account for its existence in any part of Scripture."[93] Nonetheless they had rendered no service to Holy Writ by attempting to defend its inspiration on the grounds that it was partial.

Cunningham was amongst those most committed to a doctrine of verbal inspiration and so argued most forcefully against those who, while they defended inspiration in general, denied verbal inspiration in particular. Of those disesteemed, Doddridge and Pye Smith are mentioned most often; those favoured are Carson, Gaussen and Haldane.[94] And although Cunningham was almost continually opposing Rationalists, he actually spent as much time on Romans and Tractarians, both of whom were "haters of God's word."[95] Tractarianism's evil was that it was Romish and like Rome had betrayed the cause of "truly Rational and scriptural religion" by attempting to establish "the authority of tradition or Catholic consent."[96] But overall Cunningham was more concerned about the insidious theories of Protestants than the infidelity of Papists.

Just as insidious, however. and if anything more patently wrong than theories of partial inspiration were theories which held that inspiration is nothing more, as Bannerman described it, than "the natural, or at most the gracious, agency of God illuminating the rational or the spiritual consciousness of a man, so that out of the fullness of his own Christian understanding and feelings he may speak or write the product of his own religious life and beliefs."[97] The fundamental error of this view, whose

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[93] Ibid., p.142.

[94] Cunningham, Lectures, pp.410-411.

[95] Ibid., p.480.

[96] Ibid., p.453.

[97] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.142.

great representative in modern times, Bannerman asserted, was Schleiermacher, is that it is entirely subjective and not supernatural at all, "the quickening of spiritual thought and feeling from within, not the presentation of supernatural truth from without; . . ."[98] In its most radical form this doctrine equates inspiration with religious intuition, the common property of every member of the Church of Christ, and so makes the Scripture writers just as liable to error as any Christian man. It was the view of Coleridge, Arnold, Hare and Maurice in this country and was equally hostile, along with theories of partial inspiration, to the full inspiration of the Bible.[99]

To the traditionalists any theory of inspiration which left doubts about what is and what is not the word of God was less than adequate. If the truth of the Bible is not guaranteed by a doctrine of inspiration which covers every part and every word, then what is of God and what is of men? It cannot be left up to men to decide. Besides, a right doctrine of inspiration eliminates the necessity to decide. What the defenders of the older view eschewed was subjectivism in any of its formulations, whether a theory of partial inspiration or one which effectually denied supernatural inspiration altogether. Such theories, it is true, had been, in their own way, attempts either to blunt or to accommodate early critical doubts about the absolute infallibility of the Scriptures. But, as the traditionalists saw it, the results were inadequate. In their turn they set about to reestablish what they believed to be the historic doctrine and to secure the absolute objectivity of the word of God. But they did so by, in effect, substituting a doctrine of inspiration for a doctrine of Scripture. Only Bannerman distinguished between inspiration

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[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid., pp.144-146.

and revelation, for instance. As he did,however, as we shall have occasion to see, he opened considerable gaps in his own line. So long as it was taken for granted that revelation and the Bible were the same, and that spiritual integrity and doctrinal orthodoxy were nearly the same, the Free Church Fathers' position remained relatively secure. The most effective assault on it came therefore in the form of a re-appraisal of the nature of revelation and of Christian Scripture combined with a re-appraisal of the nature of Christian belief; and of other issues as well.

CHAPTER THREE

WILLIAM ROBERTSON SMITH: "PIONEER AND MARTYR"

The trial of William Robertson Smith was the most famous of its kind, certainly in his church, perhaps in Christendom. It comprehended within itself all the elements of the conflict between faith and criticism in the late nineteenth century - the progress of theological scholarship, academic freedom, the relationship of church consensus and authority to individual opinion, the conflict between faith and science. And Smith, genius and polymath that he was, touched on, if he did not directly address, nearly all the issues implied in his case. He was, almost from the beginning of his trial, both hero and heretic.

To his students Smith was a hero. Certainly, at least, he was no heretic. At a meeting held on Monday afternoon, 12th March, 1877, in one of the classrooms of the Free Church Theological Hall in Aberdeen, they presented him with an inscribed timepiece and a formal statement of their appreciation of "your moral earnestness, your high Christian character, and your deep spiritual sympathy with evangelical religion."[1] They were sensible too, the students recorded, of the eminent gifts he had dedicated to the service of the Church and faithfully exercised in the training of her ministers.

As his later lectures on The Old Testament in the Jewish Church prove, Smith was a superb teacher. Doubtless he merited fully his students' show of esteem. But the occasion was important as well for his remarks to them on the relationship between his own faith and the

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[1] "Prof. W. Robertson Smith on Old Testament Scripture and Rationalistic Theology," a reprint of newspaper reports of a presentation made to Smith by his students in the Free Church College, Aberdeen, from the Daily Free Press, March 13, 1877, p.4. No publisher or date is given. The pamphlet includes Smith's address to the Scottish Sabbath School Convention (September 1871) on "The Place of the Old Testament in Religious Instruction."

approach to Scripture for which he was already becoming the somewhat battered symbol. The Bible, he said, is the one and all-sufficient source of our knowledge of God's way of salvation. To those - he was referring to Professor Tulloch in a recent article in The Contemporary Review[2] - who say that the first step in theological progress must be a modification of the word of God, he could only reply:

> It seems to me we may learn to understand more fully the way in which God's revelation has been set before us, that we have much to learn as to the ways and means by which at sundry times and in diverse manners God set forth His truth before us; but if we are not to find the one authority, the source of knowledge as to what God has wrought for his people in the Bible, where, I wonder, are we to find it?[3]

According to Tulloch, as Smith read him, there is some Christian philosophy in addition to the Bible, some Christian metaphysics which would be more important to us. But surely, Smith said, if Christianity is a religion of revelation at all, Scripture must be the point from which we start and upon which all progress is to be built. The Bible is the supreme authority.

> It is an authority in this sense, that all the Christian can wish to have for salvation is in it, and also that he will not find anything in it contrary to truth; he will find that the sense is not ambiguous nor uncertain, and yet that the whole sense is not exhausted at once, and that we require not only additional exegesis, but also historical and critical studies, in order to get the whole sense.[4]

After reiterating his conviction that our hope in Jesus can rest only in the Bible, Smith concluded:

> Do not let yourselves be misled by so-called liberal, progressive Theologians. Do not let yourselves be led into the belief that you yourselves cannot be progressive in your theology, but with open eyes look at God's truth

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[2] "Progress of Religious Thought in Scotland", The Contemporary Review for March of 1877, pp.535-551.

[3] "Prof. W. Robertson Smith on Old Testament Scripture and Rationalistic Theology", p.11.

[4] Ibid., p.12.

> through all means of scientific investigation,
> without giving up that which is far more precious
> than scientific investigation - a living faith
> in the living God, whereby we ourselves shall live,
> and the Church of Christ shall live also.[5]

It was an edifying discourse, often interrupted by applause. Smith had the ability to inspire as well as instruct; apparently too the rare and precious gift of doing both at the same time. In these remarks, impromptu and homiletic as they were, Smith set forth as clearly as ever he would the nature of the case he sought to defend, with more or less effect and more or less grace, throughout the five long years of his and his Church's trial. In the Bible and in the Bible alone he maintained, we have the record of the revelation God has given; and for precisely that reason we have a right, indeed an obligation, to bring to bear upon it every critical or historical method and insight. Our fuller knowledge of God depends upon our doing so. William Robertson Smith's, like George Adam Smith's, was a believing criticism, an attempt to marry the historic Protestant faith and the most recent advances in biblical scholarship.

The whole Smith case is of course the evidence that a great many of the fathers and brethren thought the attempt was, to put it no worse, a contradiction in terms. Theological orthodoxy, they said, held that the Bible, the whole Bible in every part, was the inspired and infallible word of God. Criticism, they alleged, subverted if it did not expressly deny that doctrine. The Bible, for example, claimed that Moses wrote Deuteronomy and all but a very few passages of the entire Pentateuch. The Critics maintained that Moses could not have written Deuteronomy; and if it was admitted that he did not write every single verse of the Pentateuch, what guarantee was there that he wrote even the bulk of it?

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[5] Ibid., p.13.

What then of our faith in Scripture? In other words, there could be no such thing as believing criticism - because criticism in effect made belief in the Bible impossible. One either criticised or believed but not both.

The Case

Smith's trial, which as been thoroughly covered by both the Smith and Rainy biographies and takes up nearly forty pages of the most recent general survey of the period,[6] began officially on 17th May 1876 when the College Committee of the Free Church of Scotland had its attention called to "Bible", an article Smith had contributed to the third volume of the Encyclopaedia Britannica published the year before. The Committee met again in September and appointed a Sub-Committee to consider "Bible" and also "Angels", an article Smith had written for the Encyclopaedia's second volume. The Sub-Committee submitted their report on 17th October.[7] In March of 1877 the case was referred to the Presbytery of Aberdeen which had jurisdiction over Smith, and in May of that year, at the request of Smith himself - because "it . . . appears to me that my teaching cannot be purged of suspicion except by a regular judicial process"[8] -

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[6]Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, The Church in Late Victorian Scotland: 1874-1900 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1978), pp.40-78. There is also a nice account of the case in G. F. Barbour, The Life of Alexander Whyte, D.D., (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), pp.201-226.

[7]The Sub-Committee's report constitutes Appendix I to the Special Report of the College Committee on Professor Smith's Article "Bible", Report V.-A., Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1877 (Edinburgh: Ballentyne, Hanson and Co., 1877).

[8]John Sutherland Black and George Chrystal, The Life of William Robertson Smith (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912), p.230.

the General Assembly voted to suspend Smith temporarily from his duties while the Aberdeen Presbytery prepared a formal libel against him. The libel was presented to Smith on 12th February 1878 and on the same day Smith laid his already published "Answer to the Draft Form of the Libel" before the Presbytery.

There were three general charges against Smith: (1) "the publishing and promulgating of opinions which contradict or are opposed to the doctrine of the immediate inspiration, infallible truth, and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures, or any parts thereof, as set forth in the Scriptures themselves and in the Confession of faith, and to the doctrines of prophecy and angels therein set forth"; (2) "the publishing and promulgating of opinions which are in themselves of a dangerous and unsettling tendency in their bearing on the doctrine of the immediate inspiration, infallible truth, and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures, or any parts thereof, . . ."; (3) "the publishing and promulgating of writings concerning the books of the Holy Scripture which writings, by their neutrality of attitude, in relation to the said doctrines, and by their rashness of statement in regard to the critical construction of the Scriptures, tend to disparage the Divine authority and inspired character of these books, as set forth in the Scriptures themselves and in the Confession of Faith, . . ."[9] The three general charges were supported by eight specific charges, beginning with "Views on the Aaronic Priesthood" and ending with "The Personality of Angels". In between were "The Age and Composition of Deuteronomy", "Lowering the Character of the Bible", "Discrediting the Authority of the Bible", "The Song of Solomon", "Ignoring Christ's Testimony to Old Testament Authorship", and "Disparagement of Prophecy".

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[9] Report of the Proceedings of the Free Church Presbytery of Aberdeen, February 14 to March 14, 1878, with Form of Libel (Aberdeen: Alexander Murray, 1878), p.3.

Smith appealed to the Free Synod of Aberdeen on the grounds that a charge of "tendency" (the second general charge) was not relevant. The Synod reversed the Presbytery's finding in Smith's favour with the result that the whole case was appealed by the Presbytery's minority to the General Assembly. By the time the Assembly of 1878 met Smith had produced an "Additional Answer to the Libel" and the Presbytery had rejected the charge of "neutrality" (the third general charge). In the Assembly Smith was acquitted of the specific charges under the first general charge except that dealing with Deuteronomy; and since the charge of neutrality had been dropped, only that of "tendency" was left supported by all eight of the original particulars.[10]

In the ensuing year the Presbytery again appealed to the Synod, and the case was again referred to the General Assembly. On a motion by the prosecution, the Assembly of 1879 decided by a majority of one to order the Aberdeen Presbytery a third time to try the case, this time on the single charge that Smith's views of Deuteronomy - that Moses did not write the book which the book itself represents him as having written - contradicted the doctrine of the immediate inspiration of Holy Scripture. Both the Presbytery and the Synod, meeting in September and October respectively, voted to refer the case once more to the General Assembly. The following May the Assembly voted by a majority of seven (299–292) to withdraw the libel against Smith and admonish him about the past and "the unguarded and incomplete state-ments" of the articles he had written. It was, Carnegie Simpson tells us, perhaps with pardonable exaggeration, "the most exciting vote in

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[10]The tendency charge had also been amended. It now read: "As also the publishing and promulgating of writings concerning the books of Scripture, which, by their ill-considered and unguarded setting forth of speculations of a critical kind, tend to awaken doubt, especially in the case of students, of the divine truth, inspiration, . . ." etc., Life, p.284.

the history of the Free Church Assembly."[11] Smith was duly admonished and the Assembly of 1880 and the debate over "Bible" ended with Smith declaring:

> I have never been more sensible than on the present occasion of the blame that rests upon me for statements which have proved so incomplete that, even at the end of three years, the opinion of the House has been so divided upon them. I feel that, in the providence of God, this is a very weighty lesson to one placed, as I am, in the position of a teacher, and I hope that by His grace I shall not fail to learn by it.[12]

Those are the bare bones of a case which in its detail is by turns wonderfully exciting, exceedingly frustrating and frankly, very boring. It was exciting for the eloquence and dialectical skill which it pressed out of not only Smith but some of his antagonists as well; also for the dramatic impact that it had on an entire people just a hundred years ago, an impact hardly conceivable in an age as theologically indifferent as our own. It was frustrating because from the beginning the parties seemed to be firing past one another; nor did it seem possible that church courts could ever justly resolve an issue which was essentially academic, but even more profoundly, religious. Indeed it is the significance of the trial that it showed up very clearly, as such affairs seem always to do, how wonderfully delicate are the interconnections between individual and popular opinion, religion and religious institutions, reason and rhetoric, heart and head, and raises again the whole question of why matters of spiritual moment should be decided by ecclesiastical politics.[13] It is boring because it could not have been otherwise. For every day of noble eloquence or intense,

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[11] Patrick Carnegie Simpson, The Life of Principal Rainy, Vol. I, p.372.

[12] Life, p.360.

[13] See in this regard Black and Chrystal's comment on Rainy's predicament and role in the case in Life, pp.362-363; also p.426.

sometimes bitter debate, there were a dozen of wrangling over confused and confusing legal technicalities buried in cumbrous (it is the word used in almost every account of the trial) legal documents.

Yet 1880 was not the end of the Robertson Smith Case. In less than two weeks after his acquittal another article by Smith appeared in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Hebrew Language and Literature" in the eleventh volume. By 15th June a second petition was laid before the College Committee and a second process begun. The article simply reiterated, perhaps with more precision but less dogmatism, the views of "Bible", and the new petition was in the most general terms a plan for charges very like those of the libel of 1877. Although "Hebrew Language and Literature" had been submitted to the publishers the previous Autumn, its appearance in June of 1880 could not have been less than shocking. To many it appeared that Smith simply had not intended to keep his closing word to the May Assembly. Moreover it was another chance for his enemies to do what they had not been able to do heretofore. And by the time the Commission of Assembly met in August, Smith's article "Animal Worship" in the Journal of Philology (vol. IX) had also come in for censure. The Commission appointed a Committee to review Smith's writings, which, it decided, "were fitted to produce upon the minds of readers the impression that God is not the Author of Scriptures." The Commission ratified the Committee's decision and voted to suspend Smith again from his duties in Aberdeen. Between January and April Smith prepared and delivered his popular "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church" to large audiences in Glasgow and Edinburgh.[14] With their publication in May came further praise of Smith's learning and further claims of his heterodoxy, both adding fuel to the fire. In the

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[14]In Glasgow the Lectures were given in Marcus Dods' Renfield Church. Simpson, Life of Rainy, vol. I, p.386.

early hours of 25th May, 1881, on a motion of five points moved by Dr. Rainy, the General Assembly declared by a vote of 423 to 245 that Smith's continued occupancy of his Chair was no longer safe or advantageous for the Church. Six days later Smith's tenure in Aberdeen officially ended.

Enough has been said elsewhere in assessment of the Smith case; nor is any further opinion required here. There can hardly be any doubt that [redacted] the interests of justice nor of knowledge were served by the outcome. But the case never really was a question of either law or scholarship simpliciter. It was a question, fundamentally, of religion, and of the way in which personal faith affects or is affected by scientific inquiry on the one hand and is ordered and influenced by social pressure or legal procedure on the other. Whether the Church acting as a court acted legally is certainly open to grave suspicion. Whether Smith's views have been vindicated is in many instances still an open debate; sometimes the answer is yes, sometimes no. But the latter at least is a retrospective judgement, possible only in the light of history and amenable to yet further scientific research.

At the time however it could not have been so clear that certain views of Scripture and its alleged discrepancies were not dangerous to faith - for in such matters a merely sensed or anticipated danger, or even a danger not technically proved heretical, is nonetheless a danger in the sense that it may hurt and alarm or shake the faith of some or many. Smith himself was not wholly insensitive to this aspect of the issue.[15] Does a Church then never have the right to protect itself

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[15] "It would argue indifference rather than enlightenment if the great mass of Bible-readers, to whom scientific points of view for the study of Scripture are wholly unfamiliar, could adjust themselves to a new line of investigation into the history of the Bible without passing through a crisis of anxious thought not far removed from distress and alarm." The Old Testament in the Jewish Church (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1881), p.3.

from dangers which it cannot, strictly speaking, prove, especially when such issues are decided by church members acting democratically in their own behalf, often, at the lowest levels, without very much scholarly or legal insight on a matter for which there is almost no precedent? Even Smith acknowledged that the Church had, in such matters, a certain reserve power which is unlimited because there is no court of appeal beyond it. The question was whether or not they had acted responsibly in the exercise of their power.[16] And yet it was Rainy, the one most often charged with irresponsibility,[17] who saw, probably more clearly than any, the essential nature of the case. In a series of lectures delivered in London in 1878 at the height of the trial he reminded his hearers that every new line of questioning brings with it "the tendency in a certain class of critics to drive it to extremes," so that alarmed believers are apt to think that "the only remedy against boundless extravagances, and endless uncertainty is to shut the door." The door, however, cannot be shut, he said, and in due time the danger cures itself by discussion. But none of us has all the truth on our side. "And God has placed us so, that round the central verities, and inmost convictions, there lies a margin that is debatable, in which we are denied the satisfaction of final and absolute certainty," He concluded:

> Commonly, then, these questions involve an estimate and comparison of probabilities, deriving from various quarters, and depending on many considerations. Critical conclusions are, sometimes, moral certainties; sometimes, even when far from groundless, they fall clearly short of that rank. On the other side, considerations which arise from the point of view of faith, are, sometimes certainties of faith; but, often, they are moral probabilities, of

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[16] Life, p.444.

[17] See for instance Drummond and Bulloch, The Church in Late Victorian Scotland: 1874-1900. p.78.

various degrees of evidence and value. The questions which give serious trouble are those in which, for a time at any rate, it appears that real probabilities of the first class are on one side, and real probabilities on the second class are on the other. The process by which such questions are settled, when they admit of settlement, is by a gradual appreciation of the relative worth and weight of the probablities involved, effected by discussion. The discussion is carried on by experts, and takes effect on the minds of those who are so far qualified as to be fit for jurymen. And these last are, in this department and for this purpose, the representatives of the common Christian mind.[18]

The discussion is carried on by experts but it is judged by the common Christian mind: that is the dilemma. And except for a prevailing fear and hatred of "heresy" there would have been no Smith case at all - all the more reason, we may think now, to abandon the concept completely. Nonetheless heresy was possible then and some felt deeply, even though they were hard pressed to prove it, that Robertson Smith was guilty of it. In the end passion prevailed and the Church - perhaps because in some ways it was unprepared to do otherwise - erred. But when, exactly, did it err? His biographers suggest that it may have been long before Smith was removed from his post. The "friends of orthodoxy", they claim, laid themselves open to a charge "of great negligence and culpable laxity" when they elected Smith to his professoriate in 1870.[19]

They are right of course in asserting that Smith 'entered upon his professoriate as avowedly one of those who practised the higher criticism on the canonical books"[20] and that those who appointed him should have known there might be consequences. Smith's early theological essays[21]

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[18]Robert Rainy, The Bible and Criticism (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1878), pp.146-148.

[19]Life, pp.373-374.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Lectures and Essays of William Robertson Smith, edited by John Sutherland Black and George Chrystal (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912), pp. 97-203.

reveal quite clearly the basis and bent of his thinking and his inaugural address at Aberdeen ("What History Teaches us to Seek in the Bible")[22] is a yet fuller and more definite statement of the same. The fact that it was not until 1876 and "Bible" that Smith became a case suggests that just conceivably the whole affair could have been avoided. Maybe the Church could have been educated to accept, or at least prepared to handle, the new approach to the Scriptures which shocked and distressed so many in it, turning natural and proper fear into panic and injustice in all but the wisest hearts and heads. And there can be no doubt that Smith himself, whether or not his views were right or wrong, might well have been the voice of mediation, the very one to do what he seemed to want most to do, namely to teach the Church how to understand the Bible, "the one and all-sufficient source of our knowledge of God's way of salvation", as he put it to his students, in a manner which was at the same time both critical and believing.[23]

Why then was Smith not exposed earlier, or simply not appointed in the first place? Or, to put it the other way around, what was it about "Bible" that caused such a fuss?

For a start there must be something in the fact that it appeared in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The Britannica was not a religious publication nor was it to be read solely by trained clergy who may or may not have taken its biblical articles as pieces of pure scholarship. It was a work intended for what nowadays would be called the intelligent layman. Thus Smith's views might naturally be seen to convey, as the

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[22] Ibid., pp.207-234.

[23] At his death, William Robertson Nicoll wrote that in Smith's inaugural address "there are . . . the germs of a reconciliation between faith and criticism such as we feel, with sorrowful confidence, he alone could have worked out completely." "Dr. Robertson Smith", in Princes of the Church (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921), p.66. This article is a re-print of Nicoll's tribute to Smith in The British Weekly, XV, April 5, 1894.

College Committee had it, "both to the Churches and to the world, an erroneous impression of the views entertained and allowed in the Free Church of Scotland."[24] In other words, with "Bible", critical views of Scripture, which might have otherwise been confined to divinity classrooms or minister's studies, were made public and seemed therefore to represent the mind of the Free Church to the world on topics which, though rudimentary, straightforward, and of common interest on one level, were complex, subtle and of profound theological significance on another. What might have been regarded as simply an opinion had it been said or published in a relatively limited circle, had become in "Bible", it must have seemed, a statement of acknowledged certainty in a work whose whole purpose was to be a compendium of unprejudiced fact.[25] Moreover "Bible" was written, not by a merely academic or objective student of the Bible, but by a minister and Professor of a Church which did not wholly accept his views or share his spirit.

But more important is the tone of the article itself. Despite Smith's quite legitimate protest that the plan and nature of the Encyclopaedia precluded any discussion of doctrine or statement of personal conviction,[26] it can hardly be denied that there is something about the overall impress of "Bible" that might give offense, even to a modern reader. One of Smith's closest friends and staunchest defenders

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[24]Special Report of the College Committee, pp.6-7, Proceedings and Debates, 1877.

[25]In the preface to the first volume of the ninth edition, T. S. Baynes, the editor, stated the position taken by the Encyclopaedia "in relation to the active controversies of the time - Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical." The Encyclopaedia, he said, has to do with knowledge rather than opinion and deals with all subjects from a critical and historical, rather than a dogmatic point of view. "Its main duty is to give an accurate account of the facts and an impartial summary of results in every department of inquiry and research." (pp.vii-viii).

[26]In particular in his remarks to the College Committee which make up Appendix II to their Report, pp.18ff, Proceedings and Debates, 1877.

admitted that it was so. Professor Salmond, Smith's teacher at Aberdeen and later Principal of the Free Church's Theological College there, told the Aberdeen Synod of the uneasiness he had experienced on reading the article for the first time. He intimated that the Court might conclude that "a practical mistake has been committed in giving these writings so severely scientific a form . . . ."[27] And the by no means reactionary A. Taylor Innes, upon a request by Alexander Whyte to read the article and give his impression of it, wrote back:

> Here is an article on the Bible which professes to deal not with individual books, but with the Bible as a whole. And it turns out to be wholly and exclusively analytical, critical, or disintegrative - resolutive to a large if not unlimited extent of the bonds, chronological and otherwise, which were traditionally supposed to hold the thing together, and not supplying, nor suggesting, nor attempting to supply or suggest any other.

Innes went on to say that Smith had treated the Bible as a merely human phenomenon - "The rise and progress of the thing is traced as it might be done in Phrygia or Lapland" - and suggested that practically Smith's treatment was "a strong though unintended contribution to the cause of unbelief in the Divine and that in the minds of nine tenths of readers now and after the author is in the grave", and that, scientifically, it was "an ignoring of at least one half of the problem presented by the title, and that the nobler and better half." He thought that Smith had made a "serious mistake in expressing his intentions" and that perhaps he had a duty to make an amendatory statement. He closed his reply to Whyte: "Is there no letter of the alphabet which would give him an opportunity of saying publicly to the world - not apologetically to his church - what is in him to say on the other side? He has lost his chance with B."[28]

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[27] Life, p.299.

[28] Letter from Innes to Whyte dated 5 June 1876. F.18 in the W. Robertson Smith Collection, The Cambridge University Library.

It seems pretty clear that much of "Bible" might have been written with less bite or with more sensitivity. In his discussion of the titles of the Psalms for instance, Smith said that "Here, as in the case of the historical books, we have to begin by questioning the tradition contained in the titles, . . ." Such phrases as "we must begin by questioning" must have given to many readers the impression that their author was more critical than believing. So too Smith's comment that "There is no reason to believe that any title is as old as the Psalm to which it is prefixed, and some titles are certainly wrong; . . ."[29] And in the book of Job we find poetical invention of incidents, Smith maintained, attached for didactic purposes to a name apparently derived from old tradition and "There is no valid a priori reason for denying that the Old Testament may contain other examples of the same art."[30]

There are plenty of illustrations in "Bible" of language that might have angered readers, depending upon the nature and degree of their interest in the issues with which it dealt. The Sub-Committee which originally reviewed the article quite rightly regarded some of its expressions as "defective or incautious, especially when viewed in connection with the impression which most readers are likely to bring to the perusal of them."[31] They also pointed out that while Smith stated very plainly the views of modern scholarship concerning the Bible he said nothing about its inspiration.[32] Nor was it simply a matter of Smith's remit, set by the Encyclopaedia's purpose and scope. The tone of "Bible" is almost aggressively critical. Even comments which appear to indicate conservative sympathies have a kind of sting. "The assertion

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[29] Encyclopaedia Britannica, ninth edition, vol. III, p.638.

[30] Ibid., p.639

[31] Special Report of the College Committee, p.14, Proceedings and Debates, 1877.

[32] Ibid., pp.12-13.

that no Psalm is certainly David's is hypersceptical", Smith said, "and few remains of ancient literature have an authorship so well attested as the 18th or even the 7th Psalm. These, along with the indubitably Davidic poems in the book of Samuel, give a sufficiently clear image of a very unique genius, and make the ascription of several other poems to David extremely probable."[33] To a reader convinced of the Davidic authorship of most of the Psalms and perhaps the inspiration of the titles as well, the assurance that two in the entire Psalter are certainly Davidic must have seemed very small comfort indeed.[34]

From his explanation that the word Bible in its original Greek form is a plural, "correctly expressing the fact that the sacred writings of Christendom are made up of a number of independent records, which set before us the gradual development of the religion of revelation",[35] to his comment that "In the books of Samuel the Greek enables us to correct many blunders of the Hebrew text, but shows at the same time that copyists used great freedom with details, of the text",[36] the article is almost a critical statement. Even Smith's review of the literature of biblical introduction might be construed as calculated to offend. It contains but one English title and that is recommended only because "it gives a full account of foreign investigations."[37] The complete dominance of German and Dutch names might itself arouse suspicion in those already ill-disposed toward "Continental Rationalism."

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[33] Encyclopaedia Britannica, ninth edition, vol. III, p.638.

[34] "In defending orthodox opinion the writer is still more amusing or exasperating; at least one, - nay probably two - Psalms are Davidic." A sarcastic reminiscence of "Bible", thought by Black and Chrystal to have been by W. E. Henley, which appeared in the Scots Observer, 25th May, 1899. Life, pp.500-501.

[35] Encyclopaedia Britannica, ninth edition, vol. III, p.638.

[36] Ibid., p.641.

[37] Ibid., p.648.

Again, the question was not so much whether Smith's views were right or wrong, it was the manner in which he expressed them. As Professor Salmond so clearly saw, the issue, apart from the relation of Smith's writings to the Confession, might well turn on their form, "a form making so many presuppositions of intelligence on these very questions in the minds of readers, as naturally to awaken misunderstanding with respect to the general strain and tendency and character of those writings."[38]

Something too ought to be said on the pride of place given to the question of Deuteronomy, the issue on which the case against Smith finally rested. "Not merely was the authorship of Deuteronomy the charge in the church courts", we are told, "it was also foremost in the public mind."[39] And the same commentators go on to say that "The concentration on Deuteronomy was not merely the outcome of clumsy procedure in the courts but a reflection of the great importance of the Old Testament in the minds of the Free Church."[40]

No doubt the courts were simply forced to reduce the charges to that of Deuteronomy, largely by Smith's own brilliant self-defence.

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[38] Life, p.299. Smith's Britannica articles did not come across to everyone in the same way. T. M. Lindsay characterised all those written prior to 1878 as "dry scientific resumés of strictly student work." To some, Lindsay said, they apparently revealed "the spiritual glow and subdued enthusiasm which pervaded them", while to others they seemed "simply collections of the latest results of negative criticism." "The Critical Movement in the Free Church of Scotland", The Contemporary Review, vol. XXXIII, August-November, 1878, p,26, Lindsay, Professor of Church History and later Principal in the Free Church College, Glasgow, was one of Smith's most loyal friends and most able supporters. In his articles for the Contemporary Review and The British and Foreign Evangelical Review he acted as a kind of agent for Smith and his cause. In the Contemporary Review especially he was explaining the Smith trial to the non-Scottish public as well as vindicating the rightness of Smith's views.

[39] Drummond and Bulloch, The Church in Late Victorian Scotland, 1874-1900, p.60.

[40] Ibid.

There were other charges, but as Smith pointed out, they were ill-framed or without substance.[41] On the other hand the importance of Deuteronomy need not be explained altogether in terms of clumsy procedure in the courts. Nor is it necessary to explain it, as some have done, in terms of an inordinate importance given to the Old Testament by a church whose interpretation of it was probably based on a misunderstanding anyway.[42] For at least two reasons it my be said that Deuteronomy was correctly judged the centre of conflict.

First, Deuteronomy is a kind of case-study of the whole critical problem from a popular point of view. As the Sub-Committee saw it, Smith, in denying its Mosaic authorship, had imputed to the book a pious fraud, suggested that what has traditionally been considered history is not history, and encouraged the belief that if Deuteronomy is not historical, perhaps other books of the Bible, examined by the same methods, may not be historical either.[43] One of Smith's defenders, speaking of his handling of Deuteronomy, put it this way:

> This, indeed, is the head and front of Professor Smith's offending. If he can show us that he holds nothing contrary to sound faith on this point, other matters will adjust themselves with comparative ease. His judgement on Deuteronomy is the extreme development of his critical opinions; - all that lies within it will be virtually disposed of in disposing of that. Other points may, and doubtless will remain, about which hesitation may warrantably be felt by some; but if the right mode of dealing with this opinion, and with the man who has propounded it, be once

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[41] Smith's "Answer to the Form of Libel Now Before the Free Church Presbytery of Aberdeen" (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1878) is his first and most complete defense against all the charges originally brought against him.

[42] See Drummond and Bulloch's discussion, The Church in Late Victorian Scotland, 1874-1900, pp.60-61.

[43] Special Report of the College Committee, pp.15-16, Proceedings and Debates, 1877.

> agreed on, there will be comparatively little difficulty about anything subsidiary.[44]

Second, Deuteronomy was the issue about which, as the Sub-Committee pointed out, Smith speaks "decidedly and unambiguously", whereas on other matters, "he declines to pronounce absolutely on the merits of the speculations which he reports."[45] In other words Smith himself gave the question of Mosaic authorship the place of primary importance. The book of Deuteronomy presents a distinct style, he said, which recurs in later books and suggests to many critics that the Deuteronomic hand is that of the last editor of the whole history from Genesis to Kings; and although this conclusion is not stringent, it is difficult to suppose that the legislative part of Deuteronomy is as old as Moses. Beyond doubt the book is a prophetic legislative programme, put into the mouth of Moses, and promulgated not as a new law but as a development of Mosaic principles in relation to new needs.

> If then the Deuteronomic legislation is not earlier than the prophetic period of the 8th and 7th centuries, and, accordingly, is subsequent to the elements of the Pentateuchal history which we have seen to be known to Hosea, it is plain that the chronology of the Pentateuch may be said to centre in the question whether the Levitico-Elohistic document, which embraces most of the laws in Leviticus with large parts of Exodus and Numbers, is earlier or later than Deuteronomy. The answer to this question turns almost wholly on archaeological inquiries, for there is, perhaps, no quite conclusive reference to the Elohistic record in the prophets before the Exile, or in Deuteronomy itself. And here arises the great dispute which divides critics, and makes our whole

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[44] "A Plain View of the Case of Professor W. Robertson Smith", by the Rev. William Miller M.A. (Edinburgh: Maclaren and Macniven, 1877), p.9. T. M. Lindsay explained that unlike the discussions in the Marcus Dods case, which "tended to resolve themselves into disputes about words", Smith's remarks on Pentateuchal legislation "gave definiteness to the theological principles and was easily seen to be the key to the whole position." "The Critical Movement in Scotland", pp.31-32.

[45] Special Report of the College Committee, p.16, Proceedings and Debates, 1877.

> construction of the origin of the historical books uncertain.[46]

Smith made himself very clear: the issue of Deuteronomy was determinative for the whole history from Genesis to Kings. Moreover it turned, not on theological argument but on archaeological inquiries. There is no question about whether the origin of the historical books is certain, he argued; it is uncertain and the dispute amongst critics is evidence that it is. Smith is four-square in the critical camp and Deuteronomy is the bone of contention. The Sub-Committee and the Church courts had not misread Smith's emphasis. Smith saw Deuteronomy as the crucial issue and so did they, although not perhaps for exactly the same reasons.

When the Church went wrong it was not usually in its instincts. It could sense or feel that something was amiss and even put its finger on the trouble. It could know, that is, that Smith was an irritant and know why. What it was unable to do was deal with him.

Biography

William Robertson Smith was born on 8th November 1846 at Keig, near Alford, about twenty-five miles west and slightly north of Aberdeen. He was the eldest son of William Pirie Smith, Free Church minister and former schoolmaster.[47] Although he never attended school - he was

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[46]"Bible", Encyclopaedia Britannica, ninth edition, vol. III, pp. 637-638. Four years after the trial, in his preface to Wellhausens' Prolegomena to the History of Israel (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), Smith put it like this: "Now, to take one point only, but that the most important, it must plainly make a vast difference to our whole view of the providential course of Israel's history if it appear that instead of the whole Pentateuchal law having been given to Israel before the tribes crossed the Jordan, that law really grew up little by little from its Mosaic germ, and did not attain its present form till the Israelites were the captives or the subjects of a foreign power. This is what the new school of Pentateuchal criticism undertakes to prove, and it does so in a way that should interest everyone." pp.vii-viii.

[47]He had a sister, Mary Jane, slightly older, and a brother, George, slightly younger, both of whom died during his undergraduate years at Aberdeen. Besides these three there were "three or four little brothers and sisters protectively styled 'the children' by their elders." Life, p.16.

taught at home by his father, himself a highly competent scholar[48] - he entered Aberdeen University at the age of fifteen and at the end of his undergraduate career was awarded the town council's gold medal for the best student, ill-health having prevented him from competing for any of the other prizes, except that in Christian Evidences. Smith's intellectual tastes were both scientific and literary, but from his early years he had decided on the ministry in the church of his up-bringing. After his graduation from Aberdeen he had to postpone his divinity training for a year however, again because of ill health. In the Autumn of 1866, aged twenty, he entered New College, Edinburgh where he was "fully launched on his adventurous course as a theologian!"[49] At New College he won the more important honours, taking both the entrance and exit prizes. The Summer of 1867 he spent in Germany taking classes at Bonn in mathematics as well as theology. Besides his studies, Smith was active in both the Missionary and Theological Societies at New College, as Corresponding Secretary of the first, Secretary and President as well as leading member of the second. At the same time he was assistant to P. G. Tait, distinguished Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University, under whom he "occupied a recognised position as a teacher of Physics" and with whom he formed one of the most congenial friendships of his entire life.[50] He went again to Germany in the Summer of 1869, this time to Göttingen and Heidelberg where he studied mathematics, Hebrew, and theology, Ritschl's

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[48] T. M. Lindsay refers to Pirie Smith as a self-made scholar and "one of the finest and most accurate scholars Scotland has produced." "Pioneer and Martyr of the Higher Criticism", The Review of the Churches vol. VI, no.31, 14th April 1894, p.37.

[49] Life., p.64.

[50] Ibid., pp.104-105.

lectures being the most important experience of the trip.[51] In the winter he applied for the Chair of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis in the Free Church College of Aberdeen, recently left vacant by the death of Dr. Sachs, and with strong support from Dr. Rainy and A. B. Davidson - who wrote that Smith "is by far the most distinguished student I have ever had in my department" - as well as Ritschl and other prominent Continental scholars, Smith was elected to the Chair by the General Assembly in May, 1870. His closest competitor was Mr. Salmond, his former teacher and one of his staunchest defenders during the years of his trial.[52]

As it was considered necessary for a professor to also be an ordained minister, Smith, who at the time of his election had only "taken licence", was duly ordained 2nd November, 1870, after having declared his belief that the Old and New Testament Scriptures are "the word of God and the only rule of faith and manners" and repudiated all "divisive courses."[53]

Smith's tenure in the Chair at Aberdeen was a success, socially as well as academically. He was well received amongst the faculty and popular with his students. He shared in the cultural life of the City and became intimate with some of its more distinguished members.[54] In the summer of 1872 he returned to Göttingen, this time primarily to study Arabic under Paul de Lagarde, successor to Ewald as Professor Ordinarius of Oriental Languages, although he also renewed his contacts with Ritschl and met several men of science as well. His work as Professor

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[51] "The beginning of the friendship to which they led is a landmark in the history of Smith's theological views even more important than the first impressions of the German school which he had received at Bonn in 1867." Ibid., p.111.

[52] Ibid., p.122.

[53] Ibid., pp.125-126.

[54] Ibid., 137ff.

continued unabated, lectures, essays and criticism coming from his pen with enviable regularity.[55] A short visit to Germany in the summer of 1873 was followed in the spring of 1874 by his being commissioned to do a series of articles for the Encyclopaedia Britannica's second volume. T. S. Baynes, Professor of Philosophy and English Literature at St. Andrews and editor of the projected ninth edition, was looking for someone who, "while possessing a recognised ecclesiastical position, should combine the most efficient and progressive modern scholarship with a sufficient measure of orthodoxy and a gift for the tactful handling of delicate questions", and Smith, it was felt, would answer the need.[56] He wrote on "Angel", "Apostle" and several other biblical topics. He found time to reply to Tyndall's 1874 Presidential Address to the British Association in Belfast - in which Tyndall attempted to maintain the claims of science to discuss all questions of theology "fully and freely in all their bearings"[57] - and to collaborate with Professors Tait and Balfour Stewart on The Unseen Universe, an attempt, perhaps in answer to Tyndall's Address, to show that the postulates of religious teaching and the hypotheses of contemporary science are not irreconcilable, but really point to the same conclusions, the existence of a transcendental universe and the immortality of the soul.[58] He also joined, in 1875, the Old Testament Company of the Committee for the Revision of the Authorised Version of the Bible. This brought him

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[55] Ibid, pp.154ff.

[56] Ibid., p.158.

[57] Article on Tyndall in the DNB, vol. LVII, p.435.

[58] Life, pp.163ff. According to Smith's biographers, "No one who studies the history of ideas in England during the later nineteenth century can afford to neglect The Unseen Universe." Ibid., p.163.

into contact with the best of Britain's biblical scholars[59] as well as London's cultured elite.

In December 1875 the third volume of the Encyclopaedia Britannica was published containing Smith's "Bible." By the following spring the article had received notices both of hearty approval and grave disapproval. When Smith returned in early May from a holiday on the Continent there had already been discussion, and on 17th May 1876 the article came before the College Committee of the General Assembly. It was the beginning of the end of Smith's official place in the Free Church of Scotland.

Following the dismissal from his post in Aberdeen five years later Smith moved to Edinburgh where he had been offered and accepted the joint-editorship of the Britannica, a job he performed well but with hopes for a more purely academic life. With the publication of The Prophets of Israel in April 1882, Smith's career, his biographers tell us, "was now about to enter on its final and most brilliant phase."[60] On 1st January 1883 he was appointed Lord Almoner's Reader in Arabic in Cambridge and took up permanent residence there that summer, still keeping his job at the Britannica. In January 1885 he was elected a Fellow of Christ's College and a year later Librarian of the University, a post which saw the early signs of a decline in his health. In December 1888 the ninth edition of the Britannica was

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[59] Hort, Westcott, Lightfoot on the New Testament Company for instance. It is interesting to note too that those on the "progressive side" of the Old Testament Company included not only A. B. Davidson, S. R. Driver and T. K. Cheyne, but also A. H. Sayce, who afterwards, as Black and Chrystal put it, "drifted apart from his early associates" (Life, p.168.). Sayce later became a defender of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch "and surely very unnecessarily", he and Smith were personally estranged (Ibid., pp.551-552).

[60] Ibid., p.460. The Prophets of Israel (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1882) were lectures delivered in the winter of 1881 to popular audiences in Edinburgh and Glasgow. They were a sequel to the Old Testament in The Jewish Church delivered a year earlier.

completed under his hand and in June he was elected to the Sir Thomas Adams Chair of Arabic on the death of his close friend Willian Wright. The chief event of 1889 was the publication of The Religion of the Semites, "the most original and important of all Smith's books".[61] These were the Burnett Lectures he had given in Aberdeen in October of 1888 and March of 1889 and were an explication, "following the comparative and historical method which had now for the first time been made possible", of the evolution of Old Testament religion.[62] The winter of 1890 saw him removed to Edinburgh for medical attention; also the death of his father in February, but still the completion of the second series of Burnett Lectures in March. The third series were delivered in December of the same year. A revised and enlarged edition of The Old Testament in the Jewish Church was published in 1892 in spite of sometimes alarming indications of serious illness. On 12th September during a meeting of the Ninth International Congress of Orientalists, of the Semitic Section of which he had been made president, he learned that he was suffering from tuberculosis, shortly afterward diagnosed as tuberculosis of the vertebral column. He was operated on in October and recovered enough strength for work, but never fully, despite holidays in Madeira and Scotland in the following spring and summer. In December 1893 it was determined that the spine itself had been attacked. He died 31st March 1894 in Cambridge, aged 47. He was buried in the family grave in Keig Churchyard, two miles from the church where he was baptized.

Smith was a genius. The obituary notice adopted by the Free Church General Assembly of 1894 referred to him as "among the most remarkable

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[61] Life, p.511.

[62] Ibid., p.513. The second and third series, although delivered, were never published. Ibid., p.535.

men of his time."[63] The range of his competence was amazing. "We hazard very little in saying that Professor Smith, in the depth and range of his knowledge, has no equal among living men", wrote his friend William Robertson Nicoll. With the single exception of Lord Acton, Nicoll goes on to say, none could be compared to him.[64] Had Smith not been a biblical scholar there can be little doubt that he could have made his way as a scientist.[65] During his trial (in 1879) he was a candidate for the Chair of Mathematics in the University of Glasgow.[66] His gifts were not merely technical, however, as an expertise in languages and pure science might suggest. Harvard University, after having tried to get his acceptance of their Chair of Hebrew and Other Oriental Languages, wondered, later, if he would accept a Chair of Ecclesiastical History.[67] "In metaphysics and theology, in ancient history and many departments of modern history, he was thoroughly at home."[68] "He was, in fact", said Charles Raven, "one of the most versatile of scholars, 'predestined', as his friend Wellhausen said of him, 'to hold together literature and science in combination'; . . .".[69] The praise of his powers is almost endless.[70] But it is perhaps Rainy's

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[63] Ibid., p.560.

[64] William Robertson Nicoll, "Dr. Robertson Smith", Princes of the Church, p.63.

[65] His scientific papers - mathematics and physics - make up the first section of Lectures and Essays.

[66] Life, pp.327ff. Although he received the highest recommendations from home and abroad, he was turned down.

[67] Ibid., pp.340ff and 406.

[68] James Bryce, "William Robertson Smith", Studies in Contemporary Biography (London: Macmillan and Co., 1903), p.322.

[69] Centenary of the Birth on 8th November 1846 of The Reverend Professor W. Robertson Smith, The University of Aberdeen 8th November 1946 (Aberdeen: The University Press, 1851), p.4.

[70] There is even a story of Smith repairing the compasses of a ship in which he was sailing on the Red Sea. Bryce, Studies in Contemporary Biography, p.322.

biographer and defender who is most eloquent. Writing of the Smith case, Simpson said:

> It may be questioned if any man in modern times has displayed a greater variety of brillant gifts than did William Robertson Smith during the trial both before his Presbytery and in the subsequent appeal to the higher courts. In Old Testament criticism he was facile princeps, but his talents seemed unlimited. In pure theology, he taught his hearers the doctrine of inspiration from the great divines as few had taught it before. In law he showed a knowledge and an acumen that overwhelmed professional authorities. In sheer dialectic he was irresistible, and many a time left his opponents dying pierced under the fifth rib. And with it all emerged the man's simple religious, Protestant, evangelical faith. The Church was trying him, but he was educating the church.[71]

But no man is without his detractors and not everyone was convinced that Smith's ability to acquire knowledge was matched by a power of original thought.[72] And of course the remarks quoted in praise, with the exception of Simpson's encomium, could hardly have been much muted, given the occasions of their utterance. For all of that there remains the impression of an extraordinary talent to say the least. Only an indifference to aesthetic literature seems to flaw the picture of a completely rounded intellectual character. But even that judgement, considering his insights into the poetry of the Old Testament, may have to be modified in his favour.

Of Smith's personality the opinions are neither as many nor as unanimous. Rainy's comment, often quoted, that Smith was "impossible"[73] is credible. It suggests something of the man - examples are familiar to everyone - who is right, but somehow too right, honest but somehow too honest, ingenuous, but, if it be possible, too ingenuous. It is not

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[71] Simpson, The Life of Principal Rainy, vol. I, p.334.

[72] See for instance Professor Bain's testimonial of 1870. Life, p.65.

[73] Simpson, The Life of Principal Rainy, vol. I, p.360.

difficult for those who can know him only from accounts to imagine a wonderfully gifted and therefore powerfully attractive character who was nonetheless never really a "common man."[74] He had loyal friends and life-long friendships. He was devoted to his parents and family in an exceptional and impressively intimate way. His trial speeches are punctuated with a wisdom beyond his years and even, at times, a winsome self-depreciation. Yet he obviously annoyed people. There is probably a very great deal in the almost incidental reference by one who had heard him preach to "the natural irreverence of his voice."[75] It may have been but the unconscious expression of something so deep in his being as to be called instinctive. Indeed, his biographers tell us that throughout his early intellectual interests there ran "a sort of continuous instinct for argument."[76] At the tea-time discussions which played a prominent part in his young manhood, he was disposed to "tyrannical monologues"[77] and to the end of his life he enjoyed "the congenial atmosphere of battle."[78] Although we are told that he was "never dogmatic or overbearing"[79] we are also told that, "Merciless in his criticism, he often gave pain. He had little sympathy with slow wits. . . ."[80]

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[74] A. B. Davidson's biographer maintains that Smith, in his evangelical faith, was "true as steel", but unlike his contemporary Henry Drummond and his tutor Davidson, he was divorced from life. James Strahan, Andrew Bruce Davidson (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), pp.246-248.

[75] Life, p.125.

[76] Ibid., p.20.

[77] Ibid., p.24.

[78] Ibid., p.408.

[79] Ibid., p.562.

[80] Nicoll, Princes of the Church, p.67. Part of the explanation for this aspect of Smith's character may be in his decidedly elitist views of education. See Life, pp.392ff.

Yet there are not lacking references to his religious temperament and his "simple religious, Protestant evangelical faith" as Simpson called it. J. G. Frazer, reviewing The Religion of the Semites, even thought that Smith's view of sacrifice had been too much influenced by his deeply religious nature, which caused him to underestimate the influence of fear and overestimate that of the benevolent emotions in moulding early religion.[81]

Of course there is nothing necessarily inconsistent or even paradoxical in the combination of a personality deeply religious and an intellect too conscious of its own superiority. Smith's failure was that he was either unable or did not care to understand those inferior to him. Wrote Nicoll:

> If there was anything on which the Church prided herself, in which she was one, it was in the integrity and purity of her dogmatic faith. It must be owned that Dr. Smith, whose whole life and habits had been those of a student, very little appreciated the general ways of thinking on such subjects. It was not easy for him to place himself even where most of his brethren stood.[82]

Principal Rainy, in a letter to Dr. John Laidlaw of Aberdeen, written not long before the crucial Assembly of 1877, said of the furore over "Bible" and Smith's culpability in it:

> The root of the whole mischief appears to me to be an absence of regard for the conditions under which believing men who have not great scholarship, including most ministers, maintain their faith in the Word of God, by which they live, and order their thoughts about it.[83]

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[81] Life, p.518.

[82] Nicoll, Princes of the Church, p.71. On the other hand, Stanley Cook in his preface to the third edition of The Religion of the Semites, is of the opinion that "His temperament and his profound personal faith, coupled with marvelous erudition, give him insight into the fundamental theories of religion which, it seems safe to affirm, has never been surpassed" (pp. x-xi), see also p. xxx.

[83] Simpson, Life of Principal Rainy, vol. I, p.329. Laidlaw, at the time a minister in Aberdeen and later Professor of Divinity in New College (1881-1904), moved the pro-Smith motion which was superseded by Beith's in Smith's victory in 1880. Life, pp.352ff. For a critical assessment of Laidlaw's part in the case see J. W. Keddie, "Professor MacGregor, Dr. Laidlaw and the Case of William Robertson Smith", The Evangelical Quarterly, vol. XLVIII, January-March, 1976, pp.27-39.

Rainy's biographer says that Rainy regarded Smith, with all his great gifts, as "entirely deficient of this sense of what was due to fellow-Christians' susceptibilities and fears."[84] And Simpson, who so felicitously numbered Smith's virtues, has also best described Smith's flaw.

> His purity alike of intellectual motive, of moral character and of Christian faith was unquestioned. But along with these admirable individual qualities and along with, in addition, his real personal loyalty to his Church, Professor Smith evinced a curious inability to realise the question which had been raised by his articles as anything else than, on the one hand, a question of scholarship as to whether his views could be substantiated in argument, and, on the other, a question of law as to whether they contradicted the terms of the Confession of Faith. He had very little of the further sense of what is required, even in the statement of truth as well as the direction of conduct, to the Christian society, as at least St. Paul would conceive of it. When a Corinthian Christian said to St. Paul that he was going to take meats offered to idols because "an idol is nothing," the Apostle - so to speak - looked at him, as if wondering if the man thought a mere abstract principle like that settled a question in the brotherhood of the Church. Professor Smith's whole mental temper was apt to think that the fact that his "opponents" could neither disprove his views nor show that they were heresy ended the question.[85]

And in the principal cause of Smith's life, that was surely the issue, namely the relationship of Smith's views to those of his brethren. It was not primarily whether Smith was, strictly speaking, a pioneer, as Nicoll says he was, and Professor Bevan said he was not.[86] It was how and why his opinions so disturbed the peace of the church which had nourished and taught him. The significance of the Robertson Smith Case is that it poses again, in a special way, the problem of the confrontation between change and the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

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[84] Simpson, The Life of Principal Rainy, vol. I, p.328.

[85] Ibid., p.318.

[86] Life, p.567.

William Robertson Smith presents a problem almost unique in Victorian Presbyterism. He wrote on an enormous variety of subjects, and most of them subjects of considerable importance; and as they frequently overlap or are related, it is difficult not to feel that an analysis of his faith and his criticism must take some account of nearly all of them. How is faith in Christ affected by a critical handling of the Old Testament, or vice-versa? The answer would seem to require a consideration of Smith's views of not only the Old Testament, but [redacted] of the record of the revelation of Christ in the New Testament as well; probably prophecy too, wherein the Messiah of the New Testament is most clearly set forth in the Old. There are these things to deal with then besides the more obviously germane topics of Smith and the Bible, Smith and faith, and Smith and higher criticism with which we begin.

Smith And Higher Criticism

Bevan was not the only one to deny that there was anything new in Smith's views of the Old Testament. One commentator refers to them as "moderately liberal"[87] and his biographers go to some length to underline the cautious nature of his critical work.[88] There is evidence to show that Smith was not nearly as radical, even by the standards of the scholarship then prevailing, as many of his accusers might have naturally allowed themselves to believe. Without question he sided with the modern school against traditional theories. "That I accept the leading critical conclusions of the new school of criticism will be evident to the reader of this volume", he wrote in his preface to The Prophets

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[87] John Kent, Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism (London: Epworth Press, 1978), p.137.

[88] Life, p.572.

of Israel.[89] At the same time he was never loath to take issue with the critics, especially when their method involved presuppositions which he did not share. In his Answer to the Aberdeen Presbytery he spoke of the "Critics of the school of Kuenen, with whom I have no theological sympathies, . . ." and then went on to declare his total rejection of Kuenen's view that Deuteronomy was a "fraud [redacted] off upon Josiah by the priests."[90] Almost two years before he had proclaimed that "In Germany and in Holland alike, the characteristic feature of the so-called organic view of the development of religion is not critical research, but pantheistic presuppositions."[91] And in a passage which is worth quoting in full because of its profound implications for Smith's whole lifetime of work, he said:

> The truth is, that the school to which Kuenen belongs never seriously faces the question of the objective value of religious truth. The so-called modern school sets before it an entirely different question from that of the old theology. The old theology treated of God, His attributes, His manifestation, His dealings with men. The new school treats of religion. Its theology is a discussion of feelings. When these have been analyzed, and when their development has been traced, the modern theologian is perfectly happy. Religion has been genetically explained from its beginnings down to the present time. Its ideas are most valuable, for they are part of the property of the human race, just like the Pyramids or any other great work of men's hands. And there is no more to be said about it, except that these ideas are sure to go on developing in future time as they have done in the past.
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> It is plain, I think, that no one can rest satisfied with a view like this unless he has first accepted some form of absolute philosophy, some pantheistic theory according to which everything in human history is the mechanical evolution of a hidden principle working by equally inflexible laws in the moral and physical spheres.[92]

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[89] The Prophets of Israel (1882), p. xi.

[90] "Answer", p.54.

[91] Lectures and Essays, pp.360-361.

[92] Ibid., pp.363-364.

Naturalistic views, especially the views of Kuenen, came in for severe comment in some of Smith's other earlier writings as well. Referring to the Dutch scholar's handling of prophecy, Smith said that it was no true historical criticism which did not acknowledge in history a higher element than the merely natural: "It is from a criticism that has learned this lesson, that can approach the weighty problems of prophecy from the human side without ignoring the hand of God, that we look for real fruit."[93]

Smith showed himself as able and effective a fidei defensor as any of the older school. He was not a mere pawn of continental scholarship with no mind of his own. On the other hand he had the fullest appreciation for his opponent. Although he repudiated the basic assumptions of some of the critics, he respected their scholarship and allowed for their spiritual integrity. He warned against the inference that a man with views like Kuenen's could have no true religion: "You must never allow yourself to take a man's speculative error as the proof of an absence of personal faith, which often is nourished from very different sources and lives in spite of a blighting philosophy."[94] He even implied that the difference between a true and a false criticism was more a matter of attitude than of results, or even of philosophy. True criticism, he said, in what Carnegie Simpson calls "that enlightening and thoroughly believing book", does not delight in merely proving that things long held to be true are not true or that certain books were not written by the authors whose names they bear. The true critic has

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[93] Ibid., pp.200-201.

[94] Ibid., p.366. To show that Smith could be linked to Kuenen was of course to show that Smith was heretical. That was the intent of pamphlets such as "Professor Smith's Obligations to Dr. Kuenen Indicated" by The Rev. George Macaulay. (Edinburgh: Lyon and Gemmell, 1876).

for his business, not to destroy, but to build up.[95]

It may be said that Smith embraced criticism but opposed rationalism. Often, and almost always in his own defense, he asserted that the two things need not go together. Once, anticipating the probability that his views would be labelled rationalistic, he argued that the ultimate antithesis of reason and revelation, the antithesis in terms of which he had been taught to think, was not a proper one.

> The hostility of Rationalism to Revelation is only part of the wider enmity between Pelagianism and Free grace. It is only where Revelation is recognised as a part of God's redemptive work that Rationalism has ever refused to acknowledge it . . . . Rationalism, in short, is Pelagianism of the intellect, the assertion of man's natural ability to know the things of the Spirit of God quite apart from the question whether it is by revelation or not that these spiritual things are first set before man's reason.[96]

The true antithesis, he said, is not between revelation and reason - for no man becomes a theologian simply by knowing what God has revealed - but between belief and unbelief. True theology is possible only where there is a true Christian life and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.[97] It is not simply a matter of where a man got his information from, the Bible or his own researches, but whether the man is a regenerate man. If the method - in this case the critical method - is agreed to be a true one, then let us go on and apply it, he challenged those who had come to hear him in Edinburgh and Glasgow, "and if in the application you find me calling in a rationalistic principle, if you can show at any step in my argument that I assume the impossibility of the supernatural, or reject plain facts in the

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[95] The Old Testament in the Jewish Church, (1881), p.24. See Simpson, Life of Principal Rainy, vol. I, p.387.

[96] Lectures and Essays, pp.151-152.

[97] Ibid.

interests of rationalistic theories, I will frankly confess that I am in the wrong."[98]

All along the line, Smith's contention is that scholarship must be allowed free play, barring plain infidelity and presuppositions inherently inconsistent with Christian faith. By the same token it is no argument against a proposition that it tends to unsettle belief. Indeed that is the way of rationalism, he told the Presbytery in Aberdeen, because it assumes that a supernatural revelation must contain nothing which our limited reason is unable fully to comprehend.[99]

> Let us refute the critics if we can, but do not let us say that it is impossible for us to believe or to tolerate propositions which we have not refuted by argument, and of which we cannot assert that they are actually inconsistent with anything in God's providence we know to be true.[100]

We may safely go, he seemed to be saying, where the evidence takes us; nor must we assume that we know beforehand where that will be.

Plainly then, as it was nearly his whole life's work to try to prove, Smith was not advocating either a merely destructive technique or the assumptions in which such a technique was grounded. Implicit in all that he ever said or wrote is the conviction that no real advance in scholarship could be inimical to the faith of Christ. He disavowed any connection with rationalism, whether of the sceptical or the traditional theological kind; all the while he praised the love of truth for its own sake, for such a love did not rest satisfied with "conclusions that do not commend themselves to the scientific as well as

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[98] The Old Testament in the Jewish Church, (1881), p.27.

[99] "Answer", p.11.

[100] Ibid.

the religious consciousness."[101] Smith's criticism was believing criticism, an attempt to advance faith, not in spite of, but by means of, the critical method. The great value of historical criticism, he argued, is that it makes the Old Testament more real to us.[102]

> No one, then, to whom Christianity is a reality can safely acquiesce in an unreal conception of the Old Testament history; and in an age when all are interested in historical research, no apologetic can prevent thoughtful minds from drifting away from faith if the historical study of the Old Covenant is condemned by the Church and left in the hands of unbelievers.[103]

a. Smith's Own Method

The first duty of every scholar, Smith maintained, was his duty to truth. The student cannot simply overlook the difficulties Scripture presents even if they are overlooked by the ordinary reader.[104] By honestly facing them criticism opens a way for their solution which, "bold as it may at first appear", is really far safer to faith, because truer to the actual history of God's Revelation, than "the isolated and arbitrary attempts at reconciliation of contradictory passages which were once current."[105] In other words, historical accuracy is more important than theological consistency; and to hold apparent contradictions in a kind of tension, to admit freely that they exist, is to be closer to the truth than to "solve" them by forcing them into an artificial theological harmony. Moreover, no progress can be made, he warned, by merely suppressing the statement of difficulties and forbidding scholarship from applying its legitimate methods to the study of facts.[106]

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[101] The Prophets of Israel, (1882), p. vi.

[102] The Old Testament in the Jewish Church, (1881), p. vii.

[103] Ibid.

[104] "Answer", p.12.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid., p.13.

It was Smith's belief that scholarly progress was not only possible, it was a duty. More than that, it was God-ordained. In his defense on one of criticism's discoveries - in this case "passages omitted or inserted in one or other form of the text" - he took up the story of David and Goliath in I Samuel 17 and attempted to show that the difficulties in the narrative may be explained quite easily on the thesis that certain sections belong to an inferior account of the story which were inserted into the Hebrew Bible but omitted in the Septuagint; thus the Septuagint has the more natural, probably the correct reading. He concluded:

> We do not like to think that the English Bible can contain an interpolated narrative of inferior authenticity. But that is only one side of the case. The providence which permitted the interpolation has preserved to us the Greek version in evidence of the original state of the text, enabling us even at this day to restore the true form of an important narrative, and remove difficulties which have been a stumbling-block in the way of all thoughtful readers. To shut our eyes to the evidence of the Septuagint, or to refuse to weigh it by the ordinary methods of sound common sense, would be an act of timidity, not of reverence; and it is well to learn by so plain an example that He who gave us the Scriptures has suffered them to contain some difficulties which cannot be solved without the application of critical processes.[107]

Notice that timidity is here set <u>against</u> reverence. Real reverence and real faith apparently produce, in Smith's view, a certain boldness in handling God's Word. That is, God intends, even superintends, progress. That does not mean that scholarship is always right. But it does mean that scholarship is required. Historical criticism is a comparatively modern science and has made many false and uncertain steps, he wrote in his preface to Wellhausen's <u>Prolegomena</u>; nevertheless "the process of disentangling the twisted skein of tradition is necessarily

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[107] <u>The Old Testament in the Jewish Church</u>, (1881), p.127.

a very delicate and complicated one, and involves certain operations for which special scholarship is indispensable."[108] Some years earlier, in the course of his trial, he had put it this way: "Unless the Church is prepared to say that she will tolerate no scientific study of the Bible at all, she must be prepared to tolerate imperfect views; for it is only through imperfect views, and by means of successive essays, that scientific truth can be reached on any subject.[109]

Smith's critical method was grounded in a fundamental commitment to scientific progress as well as to the historic Protestant faith. He believed that insofar as Christian faith is bound up with an understanding of Old Testament religion, biblical research was indispensable for faith. In the preface to his last work, The Religion of the Semites, he went further. The Christian faith cannot be understood apart from an understanding of the doctrines and ordinances of Israel, and those cannot be understood "until they are put into comparison with the religions of the nations akin to the Israelites."[110] Thus Smith's justification of the most thorough-going research into the Bible and its history: it is pertinent to faith. One must understand the faith of the Bible; one must therefore understand the history, in the widest sense of the word, in which the Bible is set.

Smith's critical method may be better appreciated in the light of an antithesis which he himself set up. There are generally speaking two quite different ways of approaching the Bible, he said in 1870,

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[108] Julius Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Israel. Translated by J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies, with a preface by W. Robertson Smith. (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1885), p. viii.

[109] "Additional Answer to the Libel with Some Account of the Evidence that Parts of the Pentateuchal Law are later than the time of Moses." (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1878), pp.7-8.

[110] William Robertson Smith, Lectures on the Religion of The Semites: The Fundamental Institutions, third edition. (London: A. & C. Black, 1927), p. xiv.

the historical and the theological. The first assumes no theological premises and takes it for granted that all history, no less Bible history, is to be interpreted naturalistically. The second, while it does not disavow historical procedures, nonetheless works out of a theological context, is governed, that is, by dogmatic considerations. Representative of the historical school are Ewald, "a man of original and creative power, who never fails to put great questions in a fresh and instructive light" despite "the waywardness and arbitrary self-reliance which so often disfigure his criticism", and Kuenen, whose "cold pellucidity of thought . . . lays bare to himself and others the real principles and unavoidable problems of a purely naturalistic criticism."[111] Representative of the theological school are Hofmann and Delitzsch, in whose work we see "very much which has merited the lasting gratitude of every Old Testament student."[112]

Smith did not put himself unequivocally into either camp. The line of inquiry taken by the naturalistic critics he did not think the only one which can be fruitful: "we are persuaded, indeed, that the want of a clear theological position has greatly limited the real value of the work of men like Ewald."[113] But neither did he whole-heartedly take sides with the theologians. In this early essay at any rate he simply noted the vast difference between the two approaches and the impossibility of speaking of both within the limits of a single article. What is needed in Scotland, he said, is a clear exposition of the critical method, "especially in view of the unscrupulous pertinacity with which the enemies of Christianity in England are accustomed to claim every critic as a witness on their side."[114] His own position

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[111] Lectures and Essays, pp.163-164.

[112] Ibid., p.164.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid.

apparently lies somewhere in between, or better perhaps, in some kind of combination of the two - for in Gustav Baur, a critic of the historical school, we find "the qualities . . . which seem to us to give most hope for the future - an honest painstaking spirit of inquiry which, though heartily devoted to the critical method, has reached, and is not afraid to speak out, the conviction that <u>that</u> is not a true criticism, which refuses to find in the Old Testament the special hand of a revealing God."[115]

It may not be altogether accurate to think of this as a compromise between, or a combination of, the historical and theological positions as he has described them. Indeed in one sense that is precisely what it is not - in the sense that he was trying to find a way which is exactly neither one or the other but a third. Nonetheless while Smith's point of view is clearly critical - in nearly every way he is methodologically on the side of the historical school - it is no less clearly opposed to "the enemies of Christianity" and naturalism. One theological presupposition he required at any rate: the fact of a God who acts and can be found to be acting in history studied critically. Against both a purely naturalistic criticism and one more or less theologically determined Smith posited what is best described, again, as believing criticism.

Perhaps the best analysis of his method is given in his answer to the Aberdeen Presbytery. He rested the defense of his critical opinions, he said, not merely on the technical ground that they did not transgress the limits of doctrine defined in the <u>Standards</u>, but on the higher ground that they were conceived in the spirit of true Protestantism, which, while it acknowledges the sovereign authority of the Word of God

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[115] <u>Ibid</u>. (Italics are Smith's.)

as the only rule of faith and life, at the same time allows no human authority to limit the freedom of hermeneutical research or to determine before-hand what conclusions shall be drawn from the sacred text. The Bible is spoken in the language of men and the key to its meaning must be sought in no ecclesiastical tradition or a priori theory, but in those laws of interpretation by which all the language of men is understood.[116] The true spirit of Protestant Christianity, Smith maintained, was at one with the spirit of historical endeavor.

> I have acted on the conviction that loyalty to the Bible, in a Protestant sense, is inseparable from loyalty to the approved laws of scholarly research; for if they are inapplicable to the language of Scripture, God no longer speaks to us in words that we can understand. By these laws the results of criticism must be tried; and by these they must be refuted before they can be justly condemned.[117]

But if in his view of the best way of handling the language of the Bible, Smith was not too far removed from that of the older school (William Cunningham would have spoken in similar fashion), in his view of the way Bible history should be approached he was far from them indeed. The history of God's Revelation as found in the Bible, he maintained, is not one continuous and systematic narrative, but a number of distinct documents which present the story of God's dealings with His people in a somewhat broken and disjointed manner. In order to understand the history as a whole we must piece the several documents together and use the one to elucidate the other. To do this with success we must determine as far as possible at what point in history each book comes in and what purpose it was designed to serve. The critic starts with traditional views certainly, but if, as he goes on,

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[116] "Answer", pp.63-64.

[117] Ibid., p.64.

he finds that the old view of any part of Scripture leads to irreconcilable contradictions, he argues that the contradictions must lie, not in the history but in his own standpoint, and so begins to ask whether there is not some mistake in what he has hitherto taken for granted as to the manner, the purpose, or the date of the book with which he is dealing. This method is not opposed to faith; on the contrary, it is opposed to infidelity, because the critic is sure that the history is consistent and is only anxious to reach a standpoint from which the consistency becomes manifest.[118] Very unlike Cunningham, Smith started from the history itself, not from a particular view of what the history, because it is divine history, must be.

Smith confessed that there are no doubt critics who in the form of an attempt to get a consistent view of the Old Testament literature and history eliminate God's revealing hand from history altogether. But they effect this, he said, not by what lies in the critical method itself, but by assuming "an additional and wholly alien principle", by assuming, namely, that everything supernatural is necessarily unhistorical. This, Smith argued, makes true criticism impossible: "eliminate the supernatural hand of a revealing God from the Old Testament, and you destroy the very thing on which the possibility of a sound criticism rests."[119]

Smith's line of argument is not entirely clear. Does he mean that sound criticism rests on consistency in history? And if so, does he mean that the consistency of history in turn rests on the supernatural hand of a revealing God? It might be argued that the truth of these propositions is, in neither case, altogether obvious, nor is the

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[118] Ibid., pp.39-40.

[119] Ibid., pp.40-41.

the connection between them.[120] Moreover, is this not an attempt, no less than Cunningham's, to say what history must be like? Such difficulties notwithstanding, Smith's basic position is plain enough: there is no conflict between biblical criticism and evangelical faith; indeed the two belong together. Along with Alexander Whyte who supported him, Smith would have endorsed the saying of Marcus Dods that "the man who refuses to face facts doesn't believe in God."[121]

b. Smith's Method Vs. The Older Method

Smith's primary concern in any case was not those outside the faith but those within. He wanted to demonstrate that the critical approach simply makes better sense of Bible history than the traditional approach. Generally speaking it was not his purpose to work out a philosophy of history or develop principles of historical inquiry. Rather it was to prove that the "fundamental peculiarity of the History of Revelation" - i.e. that Israel did not choose Jehovah but that Jehovah chose Israel by personal deeds as a redeeming God - is made more intelligible by modern methods than it is by uncritical traditions. These latter, he argued, "make it impossible to see an order and regular progress in God's dealings with Israel, and thus diminish the evidence of the continuous and consistent working of a Divine Personality shaping history to His own great ends."[122]

The contest between Smith and his opponents had, of course, a doctrinal shape. A trial for heresy would hardly have been possible

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[120] A useful discussion of the scientific study of history, with some special reference to the supernatural, is found in R. G. Collingwood, The Idea of History (Oxford University Press, 1946), pp.134ff; also in the critique of Collingwood in Van Harvey, The Historian and The Believer (London: SCM Press, 1967), pp.68ff.

[121] G. F. Barbour, The Life of Alexander Whyte, D.D. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), p.210.

[122] Report of the College Committee, p.23.

had it been otherwise. T. M. Lindsay claimed, however, that the real issue was not, strictly speaking, doctrinal at all. The evidence that it was not was a remark made by one of those who had voted against Smith in the Assembly of 1878. "We greatly want a school of scholars and critics in these times", Lindsay reported the member as saying, "but the school that Scotland, to have been true to herself, should have produced, was one which ought to have been, par excellence, reverent and conservative."[123] In other words, according to Lindsay, not even those opposed to Smith really minded criticism, so long as it was of their kind and supported their opinions. There existed - although Lindsay did not go so far as to say this - a considerable confusion about what were dogmatic considerations and what were scientific, the consequence of which was that while the debate seemed to be about the results of inquiry and their doctrinal implications, it was really about the legitimacy of the inquiry itself. More accurately perhaps, it seemed to be about both doctrine and method at the same time, as the remark quoted by Lindsay shows, the soundness of the method being assessed on the basis of the doctrinal soundness of its results.

Something very like that seems to have been Smith's own view of the situation. As he told the Aberdeen Presbytery earlier in 1878:

> I believe it will be found that almost in every case the offence which has been given by my writings, and the dangerous tendency which is thought to appear in them, are not due to anything speculative or hypothetical in the particulars of my positive critical construction, but to the fact that I reject old views as inadequate . . . . The real question before the Presbytery is not whether everything which I have written in my articles is correct, but whether I have shown a culpable indifference to truth in departing from traditional opinions, . . .[124]

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[123] T. M. Lindsay, "The Critical Movement in the Free Church of Scotland", The Contemporary Review, vol. XXXIII, 1878, pp.31-32.

[124] "Additional Answer", pp.9-10.

By traditional opinions Smith meant opinions regarding such things as dates and authorship of books, those things traditionally regarded as doctrinally significant matters of historical fact, but matters of fact - and this is the point - previously determined by means of theological, not scientific, processes. What Smith was saying in this somewhat oblique way was that some things long thought to belong to theology were properly the province of science and the two spheres must be carefully distinguished. The alarm caused by criticism was due to the fact that certain matters regarded as forever settled theologically seemed in danger of being overthrown scientifically; or to start from the other end, the results of the newer methods, inasmuch as they ran counter to traditional opinions, had brought the methods themselves into doubt. So it was that charges of departure from sound doctrine were often bound up with, or thought to be the same as, charges concerning the rationalistic methods of German scholarship.

Two years previous, in a lecture to his College at the end of term, Smith had spoken more explicitly along similar lines. The individual results of modern methods of criticising the text of Scripture, he said, were no more alarming to a weak faith than the new results in biblical geography, natural history, or archaeology, all of which were welcomed in the most conservative circles. The real ground of suspicion, he claimed, lies in the method itself, in the determination of modern scholars to remove all magical haze from the idiom and text of Scripture and to represent both as objects of scientific investigation.[125] The average man, he reckoned, considers

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[125]William Robertson Smith, "The Progress of Old Testament Studies", The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. XXV (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1876), pp.485-486. This was originally given as a lecture in Aberdeen at the end of the session, 1875-76.

it bad enough that scholarship should treat text and idiom scientifically; worse still when it goes further. Smith is worth quoting here.

> There is still an uneasy feeling that such a style of investigation cannot be applied to biblical subjects without profaning the sanctuary; and when modern scholarship takes yet another step, and proposes to extend the methods of general literary and historical criticism to the examination of the authorship and scope of the Old Testament books, to the history of the covenant people, and to the evolution of the Old Testament ideas; suspicion is apt to develop into open accusations that, under the guise of science, Christianity is robbed of its sacred book.[126]

Most men are naturally conservative, he had remarked earlier in the same lecture; so while the new results of scholarly study may be welcomed when they help to remove a difficulty or when they cast light on some precious truth, when they change the sense of a favourite text or affect the authorship of a favourite Psalm, it requires some exercise of faith to believe that they can really be a step towards the better understanding of the Word of God.[127] The evidence that such is the case, he declared elsewhere, is that textual criticism, which excited great alarm when it first began to discover various readings for the New Testament, is now taken by everyone as a perfectly legitimate exercise in matters of fact. The "higher" criticism, however, no less scientific in principle, is yet supposed to have no other basis than "the subjective fancies and arbitrary hypotheses" of scholars.[128] Moreover, as Smith pointed out in "Bible", the line between "lower" and "higher" criticism is not so easy to draw.[129]

All of these things are common knowledge to the modern student of the Bible, but Smith's pronouncements on them are evidence that he was

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[126] Ibid.

[127] Ibid., p.474.

[128] The Old Testament in the Jewish Church, (1881), p.105.

[129] Encyclopaedia Britannica, ninth edition, vol. III, p.638.

fully aware that what was involved were not simply right answers to rather straightforward questions of history or exegesis. From the beginning he understood that there was more in the confrontation between old and new than that.

The problem with the older conception, as he saw it, was not that particular doctrines of the Church are false but that "the whole method and system of theology is artificial, insecure, and hampering to the freedom of the individual; . . ."[130] Although he recognised that a real battle between Christian theology and unbelief was raging, he questioned whether the renewed interest in the defense of Christianity, as then manifested, was really such a good thing. A purely apologetical theology, he maintained, was not likely to produce lasting fruit - primarily because it is not the first business of theology to be apologetical. The highest, but also "the most immediately practical" task of theology, he declared, is to guide the internal growth of the Church. Those who allow themselves to be carried away from this aim by the apparent urgency of the danger from without misapprehend the real needs of the Church and the real sources of the weakness and strength of Christianity, which is always invincible from without, "except when weakened by corruption and divisions within."[131]

Smith drew a sharp distinction between the study of history and dogmatics. He sought (he said in his preface to The Prophets of Israel) to keep his discussion as close as possible to the historical facts without raising dogmatic issues, "which for the most part have very little to do with the proper function of the historical interpreter."[132] He was sensitive to the fact that it is impossible to deal frankly with

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[130] Lectures and Essays, p.149.

[131] Ibid., p.314.

[132] The Prophets of Israel (1881), p. ix.

any biblical problem without saying things which challenge opposition, but if the purpose is to give help to Bible students and not to advance the interests of a theological party, the controversial method should always be avoided, "for the questions of modern controversy are generally derived from medieval rather than Biblical thought."[133]

It is difficult to imagine a view of things further removed from that of the older school, especially that represented by Principal Cunningham, who saw History as not much more than an apologetical tool.[134] "The constant appeal to Scripture proof in the sense of the old dogmatic, combined with an apologetic activity in justification of the conception of Scripture on which this system of proof rests", as Smith somewhat awkwardly described it, cannot, he maintained, dispose of modern doubts. Such doubts, he said, are based on "the perception of the real inadequacy of very much in the present attitude of the conservative theology." The only way to escape what he called "the wave of violent unbelief which has already swept over the German churches", was, in his view, not to suppress the new currents of thought, but frankly to admit the need of progress in our theological conceptions; and that meant "to refuse to regard theology as a system of deductions from fixed axioms or a mere compend of Scripture statement" and to recognise "a positive activity of the theologising subject dialectically evolving the contents of an internal consciousness."[135] The new movement, Smith claimed, is a rebellion against the formalism of both the old rationalism and the old supernaturalism.[136] In a word, generally and practically speaking: "it is mainly the confessional

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[133] Ibid.

[134] Cunningham's method in this regard is discussed in chapter 5.

[135] Lectures and Essays, pp.150-151.

[136] Ibid., p.148.

theology that men are dissatisfied with."[137] Smith could hardly be accused of equivocating here! It was precisely the confessional theology, that the older school were fired to defend.

But in saying that men were dissatisfied with confessional theology, Smith did not mean that doctrines which they once believed to be true they now believed to be false, or that what was needed was a closer examination of the creed in the light of Scripture, producing but another flurry of exegesis and another spate of proof-texts. He meant that the whole mind and manner of Christian theology was in need of overhaul, involving, principally, questions and answers about the fundamental nature of Christian belief and the nature and function of Holy Scripture.

Lindsay then was right, in part. The issue between Smith and his opponents was not essentially about doctrine but about method, and with this Smith concurred. At least the issue was not really about such things as whether Moses wrote the Pentateuch, or even, at a deeper level, whether the Bible was infallible and fully authoritative. But it was, at yet another level - and here it may be said that Lindsay's analysis did not go far enough - doctrinal or theological in the sense that it was concerned with the profounder questions - perhaps they should be called theological/religious questions - which lie below and support the others. To those and Smith's views of them we must now turn.

The Nature Of Faith

Smith regarded the "apologetic way of starting" in theology "perverse and unchurchly", and natural theology, apart from Christianity, "an absolute fiction."[138] What he meant was that they both were

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[137] Ibid., p.149.

[138] Ibid., p.156.

circular and/or rationalistic, proving what in fact it had already assumed, or trying to establish what could be known only by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Apologetics, he maintained, is meant to speak to those outside the church, theology to those inside. But the evidence that even within its proper sphere apologetics could go only so far, is the fact that the Deists of the old type saw the sure marks of deception in the very miracles which to their opponents proved Christianity to be from God.[139] And for the church to continue to try to nurture itself on evidences is simply to reveal her own lifelessness. To Smith it was no accident that the age of "The Christian Evidences" was also the age of moderatism, the age when the truest spirituality was often forced into sectarianism and heterodoxy.[140] True Christian faith, in Smith's conception, had nothing to do with doctrines deduced from Scripture, the authority of which was in its turn deduced from natural theology. Even the doctrines which are supposed natural, he said, and which the written word always presupposes, are consequences, not presuppositions, of true Christian faith. It follows then that Christianity is in the first instance "so absolutely a thing of the heart" that it has to construct for itself the very elements of a knowledge of God.

> The subjective consciousness of union with God in Christ is absolutely the first thing in true Christianity, and it is from this consciousness outwards that the Christian develops for himself a true notion of God and a true notion of man. All doctrine even of revelation that had previously been presented to a man's mind from the outside has to be made over again from the inside as soon as the Holy Spirit has begun true faith in the soul.[141]

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[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid., pp.155-156.

[141] Ibid., p.157.

a. Faith: Personal Not Doctrinal

What Smith never ceased to oppose was belief viewed as assent to doctrine. In this of course he struck at the very heart of the older orthodoxy which held that the foundation of Christianity is, as he described it in one of his earliest essays, "a knowledge of the religious object communicated to men from without in the form of doctrine" and requiring to be supported by a view of the Bible as God's revelation of Himself in a compendium of infallible truths.[142]

Christianity for Smith was above everything else personal. The word is foremost in his every definition of Protestant belief. He conceded that in one sense a man believes a thing when he cannot prove it but has something toward a proof, as in Butler, but the object of that sort of belief is a mere hypothesis, and "no Christian would feel that a hypothetical Christianity was worth having."[143] The kind of belief Smith was contending for is belief in a person, and where truths come into it, they come in because they are, in the first instance, truths spoken by a person whose veracity the believer trusts. So far as belief in the postulates of Christianity is based on mere phenomenal probabilities it contains no personal element; so far as it resolves itself into belief in a person, it does.

> What makes our Christianity precious to us is that it is essentially a real fellowship between God and man mediated through Jesus Christ as our Redeemer from sin. It is a personal relation to Christ and to God in Christ that we seek in Christianity, and it is the reality of this relationship that we are concerned to maintain with all the energy we may against all who deny it.[144]

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[142] Ibid., pp.117-118.

[143] Ibid., p.111.

[144] Ibid., p.113. A recent commentator has compared Smith to Kierkegaard (in the latter's Concluding Unscientific Postscript) in their mutual denial that Christianity is primarily a matter of probabilities. Donald R. Nelson, "The Theological Development of the Young Robertson Smith", The Evangelical Quarterly, vol. XLV, No. 2, 1973, p.92.

God has entered into the world to redeem men from their sin and misery and establish with them a union with Himself; and the proof of the supernaturalness of Christianity is in the fact that men have a real relationship with Him, effected by His actual coming into their history. "The sum and substance of personal Christianity", he told a Sabbath School Convention meeting in Aberdeen in September 1871,

> is just to come under the influence of Christ's person as His Apostles did, giving up our whole lives to Him, as one who shows Himself to us as the ever-living, all-powerful, and all-loving Son of God, by whom God reconciles the world to Himself . . . . Saving faith is a thing directly between me and God, and faith in Christ can be inspired only by God's Spirit, by the Spirit of Christ.[145]

This quintessentially personal faith Smith opposed to what he believed was the rationalism of the older theologians, who treated revelation, not as a revelation of God's person, but as a communication of doctrine, and in effect regarded doctrine as the object of faith and intellectual assent its means. But who were "the older theologians"? For all his stringency of argument, Smith, interestingly, almost never named the men whose systems he opposed. Within the space of a few pages in what is his most theological, as well as one of his earliest statements, however, he cited Owen, Cunningham, Turretin, and Hodge.[146] Their theology, in his view, runs perilously close to being "quite orthodox" while standing "in no necessary relation to the Christian life." Their whole approach to Christian faith depends upon the logically tenuous and religiously dangerous practice of "bringing out the doctrine of inspiration in isolation from all other doctrines as the absolute prius in the system of Christian theology, capable of being demonstrated by evidence convincing even to those who have not experienced

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[145] Lectures and Essays, p.290.

[146] Ibid., pp.144-155. Bannerman is mentioned parenthetically in another essay and in another connection on p.131.

the power of Christianity."[147] This Smith regarded as Rationalism, a failure to acknowledge the preeminently personal and spiritual character of saving faith.

b. Faith: Personal But Not Mystical

But by divorcing himself from what he considered the older orthodoxy's intellectualism had not Smith embraced an equally unseemly subjectivism? Smith anticipated the likelihood of the charge. "But some will say", as he put it himself, "you fall back into the no less dangerous extreme of mysticism, giving an unbounded play to unrestrained subjectivity."[148] He recognised that in his determination to escape one net he might have simply played into another. In both this and a later lecture on theology, given mid-way through his professoriate in Aberdeen, he made it quite clear that he had not. Christian faith is conscious and moral, he said, and no kind of moral action is an affair of pure subjectivity. "All morality implies purpose, and purpose is conditioned by antecedent knowledge of the thing proposed."[149] He then went on to condemn pantheists and mystics, the first depicting Deity as "a subtle principle of physical influence, which a man sucks in as he does the breeze and the sunshine", and the second tending to make Christianity "an affair of feeling and instinct rather than of knowledge and will."[150] Thus the need for a rigorous study of theology: although it is not the substance of true faith, it nourishes faith. Saving faith then is neither "a mere intellectual persuasion" nor "a mere subjective habit of mind", but "the intelligent and moral outgoing of the personality and will towards a personal revelation of God."[151]

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[147] Ibid., pp.153-154.

[148] Ibid., p.157.

[149] Ibid., p.317.

[150] Ibid., pp.317-318.

[151] Ibid., p.318.

So far from deprecating the importance of Christian knowledge, Smith demanded it. Without a firm grasp of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, he asserted, men turn inward, supposing that they are saved by believing that they are saved, or by gaining, "through some kind of empirical experience", a conviction that they have passed from death to life.[152] This, Smith maintained, was a false Protestantism and its adherents "a kind of Protestant mystics", who, "when they become sufficiently conscious of their own position", separate from the Church and form "these monotonous sects whose one spiritual weapon is the ever repeated question, 'Have you believed?' and whose theology consists wholly of abusive polemic and millenarian dreams."[153]

While Smith perhaps insufficiently appreciated the varieties of mysticism,[154] he was nevertheless sensitive to the "richness of aesthetic fancy and warmth of religious feeling" of those he termed "the old mystics." Those whom he was especially eager to disown were, apparently, the sectarian enthusiasts of his own day. In any case, he drew a clear distinction between subjective and objective religion and stood unequivocally on the side of the latter. Not only did he declare that our religious life must be objective, he declared that its objectivity must be guaranteed by theological knowledge drawn from the Scriptures.

"Objective", in Smith's use of the word, was not inconsistent with "personal." In fact it may be said that for Smith, the thing that makes faith objective is precisely the fact that it is personal, a "conscious converse with God." Having God and not one's own feelings

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[152] Ibid., p.320

[153] Ibid.

[154] That of The Cloud of Unknowing or Meister Eckhart for instance could hardly be characterised as purely subjective.

for its object, faith cannot be subjective. And just as our relationship with God must never be merely personal, i.e. individualistic and cut off from the theology of the Church, neither need our individual knowledge be systematised - for the simple reason, in part, that not all Christians are capable of systematic thought. As Smith said: "It is not pretended, of course, that every believer is necessarily master of all theology, but it is held that the knowledge indispensable to faith is, so far as it goes, theological."[155]

Smith wanted a living and not a formal faith which yet was not a mere dialogue, as it were, with oneself, "not bounded by the circuit of my own subjectivity" as he put it in an apt phrase.[156] He wanted a faith whose essence was personal communion with God Himself, but one which was supported and nourished by doctrine and the church's means of grace. For an illustration of the elements in their proper combination and form he turned to the apostolic community.

> The early Christians had no formulated doctrine of the person of Christ, and no theory of the atonement. But in a practical way they knew that Christ was a Divine Person, for they worshipped Him; and they knew that He had reconciled them with God, for they walked in the joyful consciousness of reconciliation. The Medieval Church had no doctrine of justification by faith, yet certainly in all ages the Church is justified by faith.[157]

Smith had made plain at least this much: what he referred to as rationalism, faith built, in the final analysis, on evidences, would not do; on the other hand, neither would a merely intuitional religiousness.

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[155] Lectures and Essays, p.321.

[156] Ibid., p.154.

[157] Ibid., p.332.

c. Faith: Redemption And Revelation

What is not yet plain is the precise relationship, in Smith's conception, between belief and knowledge. How does he get, in other words, from the simple personal faith that saves to the knowledge which, though not in itself saving, is nonetheless required? To put it another way, what is Smith's understanding of biblical revelation?

For Smith, redemption and revelation are bound together. In fact, God's work in revelation cannot be separated from His work in redemption. It would be absurd, Smith maintained, to think that we cannot be assured that Christ's redeeming work ever took place until we have proved that the Bible is an infallible record of that work, for it is only through Christ's supernatural work that the way is cleared for the doctrine of inspiration.[158] According to Smith, we are not persuaded that Christ has redeemed us because we believe the Bible to be true; we believe the Bible to be true because Christ has redeemed us. Revelation is one with redemption, a form, in fact, of God's redemptive activity by which man is enabled rightly to apprehend God.[159] As God reveals Himself to men in Scripture by the Holy Spirit they experience His saving power and believe; that experience is then developed into a knowledge of the revealing God which is the content of a truly Christian theology.[160] The starting point for theological knowledge is within, not without, in the Word as Christ's saving gospel, as he put it in his famous Aberdeen inaugural, not in the word as the mere sign of impersonal truth.[161] But again, this is not, according

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[158] Ibid., p.122.

[159] Ibid., pp.125-126.

[160] Ibid., pp.157-158.

[161] Ibid., p.227, note 3.

to Smith, a merely subjective affair. "It is a real objective revelation which operating in our hearts produces a consciousness in the first instance indeed subjective, but capable of being developed into a true knowledge of the revealing God."[162]

As with his views on apologetics and the primary function of theology, Smith's views on revelation and the essential nature of religious knowledge constitute a nearly polar opposite to those of his immediate predecessors. Throughout his Lectures, Cunningham speaks of God making known His mind and His will, and in one place he refered to Christ and his Apostles as "divinely commissioned teachers" to whom we are required to submit in likewise "communicating instruction about religious matters."[163] This way of looking at the Word of God Smith regarded as medieval. The pre-Reformation theologians (to whom Smith often likened his predecessors) conceived of Christ above all as a teacher, and revelation as the imparting of speculative truth. "But to the Reformers the Word of God is the direct personal message of God's love to me; not doctrine but promise, not the display of God's thoughts, but of His loving purpose, in a word, of Himself as my God."[164]

d. Faith And The Bible

The very fundamental differences between Smith and the older school are everywhere apparent, not least in this matter of the content of revelation. For the traditionalists that content was essentially doctrinal or propositional; for Smith it was essentially personal.

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[162] Ibid., pp.157-158. Nelson, "The Theological Development of the Young Robertson Smith", p.90, calls this "revelation as Existential Encounter."

[163] Cunningham, Theological Lectures, p.269. Lecture XXI is perhaps the one where references to God's revelation as revelations of His will are most conspicious.

[164] Lectures and Essays, p.226. (Italics are Smith's.)

But a revelation essentially propositional requires an inspired book in a way in which, at least on the surface, a revelation essentially personal does not. What then is the place of the Bible in Smith's thinking?

The link between man's personal consciousness of God and the Bible consists in Smith of two affirmations, one following from the other and both in line with his view of revelation as primarily historical and personal.

The first is that a genuine personal union between God and man is in itself an historical fact. If such a union has truly taken place in the human consciousness then it is as much a datum of history as any other "event."[165] Revelation properly speaking has two sides, manifestation and inspiration. The former is God's self-disclosure to men, the latter is the Holy Spirit's confirmation of that disclosure in their hearts. These two sides must be distinguished, yet they are inseparable - because the revelation of God, to become part of human history, must have men as its organs.[166] And since revelation is not the revelation of mere speculative truths, but the revelation of God's Person, its form on the human side is necessarily that of a personal union of God with men, in men, and therefore in history.

The second is that this divine manifestation of God to and in men - which in the first instance required "no further supernatural step" to give it "its full force" - this manifestation must remain a power in history. "It is necessary that every generation should be able to stand directly under the influence of the historical manifestation of Christ."[167] This is possible only through an historical

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[165] Ibid., pp.131-132.

[166] Ibid., p.130.

[167] Ibid., p.132.

tradition fixed in writing during the very course of the revelation itself.[168] For:

> Without such an original record both of the manifestation and inspiration - a record breathing the fresh life of the age from which it flows - it would be impossible for us to have such a lively vision of the events of revelation as to feel ourselves under the personal influence of the divine manifestation. Apart from this no knowledge of religious truths can save us. We must have such a record of revelation as may serve as the medium to bring us into personal contact with Christ. That the events of revelation can be brought before us in a perfectly real and lively form only by a record at first-hand - a record whose author was himself an actor in the history he records and whose narrative thus becomes itself a part of the history - is obvious.[169]

The Bible is the record of the revelation of God in history, from earliest times up to and culminating in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ.[170] In the Bible we are brought into contact with "the historical realities of Christianity." We can no longer see Christ with our bodily eyes. But to us, Smith said, quoting Luther, the written word is "the outward vehicle which manifests the person of the God-man."[171] We must move beyond the form, however, into "living union with the substance."[172] In other words we meet the historical Christ in the Scriptures, then by a growing experimental intercourse with Him, by "comparing every point in the gospel history with our own personal necessities", our faith develops into knowledge. In this we are like the Apostles themselves - first the experience of Christ in love, then developed knowledge of Him. The difference is that our contact with Christ is mediated by those who were eye-witnesses of His saving work and our experience of that work must be checked against

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[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid.

[170] Ibid., p.158.

[171] Ibid., p.159.

[172] Ibid., pp.159-160.

the record of their experience, because "a true operation of God . . . can never be out of harmony with His working in days gone by."[173]

This argument really constitutes Smith's doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. Because the authors of Scripture were not mere spectators, but actors in the history they recorded, they are "of necessity the authentic expositors of revelation."[174] They were not only there, they participated; only they, therefore, could get it right. But more than that: "If they did not understand it rightly revelation falls dead upon the world."[175]

In the end Smith's is nearly as strong a statement for the inspiration and authority of Scripture as any delivered by the older theologians. It is developed along completely different lines, however. Whereas they begin with the nature of the inspiration of the record, Smith begins with the nature of the revelation of which the record's inspiration is simply an important component. For Smith the authority of Scripture is not something which needs to be established outside of or prior to a discussion of God's revelation. It is established by the fact of the revelation itself - because the men who recorded it are the men in whom it took place. "And thus arises at once - without any inquiry into the infallibility of Scripture, without any theory of inspiration in actu scribendi - the complete proof of the normative authority of the Bible."[176] In Smith's own conclusion to his argument we have a declaration of his belief in the authority of Scripture and, more especially, the way in which his development of the doctrine differs from that of his predecessors.

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[173] Ibid., p.160.

[174] Ibid., p.132.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Ibid., pp.132-133.

The question is whether Smith differed from his predecessors only in his method of establishing a doctrine which, in the end was essentially (as it may seem) the same as theirs. Are their doctrines really the same? There can be little doubt that Smith believed in the absolute authority of the Bible. In fact his commitment to the historical and necessarily human aspect of revelation was also, a commitment to the authority of the record of that revelation. Moreover, Smith believed nothing less than that "Scripture is the medium through which we come face to face with the divine revelation in Christ."[177] He did not believe, however, as we have seen, that belief in the authority of Scripture was therefore logically or psychologically prior to belief in Christ. On the contrary: "our belief in the authority of Scripture much rather is derived from a belief in Christ."[178] Nor did he believe - and this is even more fundamental to the difference between his and the older view - that Scripture, even though it is the means of our contact with Christ, need be absolutely accurate. "The great point is not the superior accuracy of a contemporary record", he said, "but its superior personality."[179] Which is simply a way of saying that it is the testimony of the Holy Spirit which convinces us of the authority of the Scriptures, not some proof of their absolute historical reliability. Not surprisingly, having started with a much different view of the nature of faith from that of the older school, and of the nature of revelation, Smith has arrived at a different view of the nature of the Bible as well.

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[177] Ibid., p.135.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Ibid., p.132.

The Nature Of The Bible

Professor W. Robertson Smith's doctrine of Scripture, T. M. Lindsay suggested in an article with that title, might best be described by distinguishing it "from the common Broad Church doctrine on the one hand, and from what may be called the Princeton view on the other."[180] T. K. Cheyne protested that Lindsay, in setting Smith's sophisticated utterances against a more or less simplified description of Broad Church view intended for lay readers, had been "not quite fair."[181] In other words, according to Cheyne, Lindsay had not done full justice to the depth and variety of a view, or views, which he had simply caricatured "Broad Church." Probably Cheyne was right. Probably, in fact, both "the common Broad Church doctrine" and "the Princeton view" are caricatures, suggesting that the thing sketched is less complicated or more superficial than it really is. Nevertheless generalisations have their uses, and Lindsay's "Broad Church doctrine" and "Princeton

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[180] "Professor W. Robertson Smith's Doctrine of Scripture", The Expositor, vol. X, 1894, p.241. The "Princeton view" would be that of, principally, Charles Hodge (following Archibald Alexander), his son Archibald Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield. From Princeton Seminary, they were leading American theologians throughout most of the nineteenth-century. Their notably strong adherence to the Westminster Confession and especially to a high view of verbal inspiration and biblical infallibility became known as the "Princeton theology." The "Broad Church doctrine" would probably be a reference to the views of, principally, Thomas Arnold, F. D. Maurice, Julius Hare, and behind them, S. T. Coleridge, whose view, generally speaking, laid primary stress on the "inspiration", even intuition, of the reader of the Bible rather than the infallibility of the Bible itself.

[181] "Professor Lindsay's article on Professor W. Robertson Smith's Doctrine of Scripture", The Expositor, vol. X, 1894, p.370. At the time of this article Cheyne was Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Scripture at Oxford, a post he held from 1885-1908. A student of Ewald at Göttingen, he was an early British exponent of Pentateuchal criticism. After various publications of Old Testament books and subjects, he edited, in conjunction with J. Sutherland Black, the Encyclopaedia Biblica. The work was Smith's conception but he died before he could set his own hand to it.

view" are perhaps as useful, and as ingenious a means of access to Smith's view of the Bible as any.

The difference between Smith and the Broad Church, according to Lindsay, is that while they regard some parts of the Bible as God's Word and some parts not, Smith regards the whole of it, "even geographical and architectural descriptions", as necessary to complete the manifestation of God to His people.[182] The difference between Smith and the Princeton school is that whereas they completely identify the Word of God with Scripture, Smith distinguishes between them. Whereas they by their identification can allow no errors whatever in the Bible, or for that matter any approach to it which recognises errors, Smith by his distinction provides for himself the freedom to treat some things in the Bible as matters for ordinary human investigation, leaving untouched that which can be apprehended only by faith and the illumination of the Holy Spirit.[183]

Lindsay's analysis is accurate enough; and while it does not deal with technicalities, it provides a broad outline of what Smith's views of the nature of the Bible were. What remains is to fill in the details, to indicate more precisely how Smith's position managed to be both like and unlike each of those with which Lindsay juxtaposed it.

a. The Bible Vs. The Word Of God

The fact that there was a heresy trial at all is evidence that most people thought of Smith's views as much more like those of the Broad Church than those of the Princeton school. It must be kept in mind, however, that whatever Smith may have been accused of - or even guilty of - he consistently proclaimed his belief in the absolute

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[182] "Professor W. Robertson Smith's Doctrine of Scripture", The Expositor, vol. X, 1894, p.252.

[183] Ibid., pp.255-256; also p.261.

authority of Scripture. This much at least he shared with the Princeton theologians: he took the Bible, all of it, with complete seriousness. In a speech before the General Assembly in 1878 Smith declared his conviction that the value of the whole Bible lies in the fact that, directly or indirectly, every part serves to convey to us an infallible declaration of the will of God.[184]

The all-important difference between Smith and his Free Church antagonists is the distinction which he made between the Bible and the Word of God. In his Answer to the Aberdeen Presbytery, one of his most explicit and extended statements on this subject, Smith spent several pages discussing the phrase "Scripture is the Word of God" and the relative stress that is placed on the word "is." When Smith used the phrase he did not take "is" to mean logical identity, as, Lindsay pointed out, the Princeton theologians do - and "as Lutherans and Romanists do in the famous controversy on the words "This is my body."[185] He distinguished "between the Word of God, as it was first spoken by Revelation" and the Scriptures in which that word was afterwards recorded, and ventured that "the conclusion that Scripture <u>is</u> of infallible truth and Divine authority, will be more correctly expressed by saying that Scripture records or conveys to us the infallible and authoritative Word of God."[186] And as if to vindicate Lindsay's contrast of his position with that of the Broad Church, Smith added in a footnote that he used the expression "Scripture records or conveys to us the Word of God" because "some modern writers have twisted the Calvinistic expression /'this word is to be sought in the Holy Scriptures <u>wherein</u>

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[184] <u>Proceedings and Debates of General Assembly of The Free Church of Scotland</u>, held at Glasgow, May, 1878 (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, Hanson and Co., 1878), p.127.

[185] "Answer", p.24; Lindsay, "Professor W. Robertson Smith's Doctrine of Scripture", <u>The Expositor</u>, vol. X (1894), p.254.

[186] "Answer", p.24.

it is contained', opera viii. 24. 7 in a new sense."

> People now say that Scripture contains God's word, when they mean that part of the Bible is the Word of God, and another part is the word of man. That is not the doctrine of our churches, which hold that the substance of all Scripture is God's Word. What is not part of the record of God's Word, is no part of Scripture. Only we must distinguish between the record and the Divine communication of God's heart and will which the record conveys.[187]

The final sentence might well have had the effect of undoing all that had preceded it. Smith recognised the possibility. Did not his view leave too little for faith to stand on, he asked, leaving us open to doubt whether the Scripture is a correct and adequate record?

> By no means, replies the theology of the Reformation, for the Holy Spirit accompanies the Word as it is brought to us in Scripture, with exactly the same testimony which he bare to the Word in the hearts of its first hearers, nay, even with the very same testimony whereby he assured the prophets and apostles that the word which they preached was God's Word, and not their own.[188]

Smith was firm in his assertion that the Holy Spirit attended the word of God to us exactly as He attended it to the prophets and apostles. The new and awkward thing was his distinction: the witness of the Spirit testifies directly to the infallible truth of the Divine Word, "the spiritual doctrine, the revelation of God Himself, which is the substance of the record", but it does not attach itself to "the outward characters of the record."[189] The work of the Holy Spirit has everything to do, in Smith's view, with the nature of the Divine word itself. The Spirit does not attach itself to the outward characters of the record, because the outward characters are not in themselves that which God is speaking to us about. "God's Word is the declaration of what is in God's heart with regard to us. And so its certainty lies in its

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[187] Ibid. (The brackets are Smith's.)

[188] Ibid., p.25.

[189] Ibid.

substance, not in the way in which it comes to us."[190] Scripture is essentially, Smith said, what it is its business to convey. But that does not mean that we can turn the proposition around and say that the infallibility which belongs to the substance of the revelation extends to the outward form of the record, or that the self-evidencing power of the Word as a rule of faith and life extends to expressions in Scripture which are indifferent to faith and life.[191]

How this way of regarding the matter differs, practically, from the Broad Church error of saying that some parts of the Bible are inspired and some are not is not immediately apparent. Both would seem to require, in the final analysis, some sort of judgement about what things are or are not indifferent to faith and life, and therefore what things are or are not inspired - unless of course one begins from the other end and says that precisely because the Holy Spirit so clearly bears witness with our Spirit concerning the Divine Word which it alone attends, the need for "judgements" of any kind is obviated altogether. No doubt that is exactly what Smith meant by talking about "the self-evidencing power of the Word as a rule of faith and life" in contrast to mere "expressions in Scripture which are indifferent to faith and life." But surely Coleridge had said as much.[192]

b. The Infallible Revelation Vs. The Imperfect Record

Whatever loopholes or possibilities for misunderstanding there may be in his argument, it is not hard to appreciate Smith's main point: God's word is a spiritual word, spoken to the heart and apprehended by

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[190] Ibid.

[191] Ibid., p.26.

[192] Aids to Reflection and Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit (London: George Bell and Sons, 1893), pp.333ff, perhaps especially pp.336-337.

the Spirit, for the same Spirit which attends it works also in us. As such, the word must be distinguished from the human machinery, as it were, by which it is conveyed. For unless we make a distinction between the revelation and the record of the revelation, Smith argued, we find ourselves in an impossible dilemma: if we extend the principle of infallibility to include all questions of "the origin, history, literary form, and literary character" of the biblical books, going beyond, as he believed, the intention of the Westminster divines, "it is plain that we cannot stop short of the assertion that the Bible, as we now have it, contains no error or inaccuracy of even the most trivial kind."[193] That the Bible does in fact contain errors in the present text Smith declared to be "an undeniable fact, freely admitted by sound theologians from Luther and Calvin downwards."[194] Nor is the attempt to assign such errors to copyists - on the supposition that the errors were not present in the original manuscripts - tenable either, Smith maintained, because that supposition, "which is merely an hypothesis devised to support a certain theory of the inspiration of the writers", has no foundation in the Confession.[195] And in a passage which was an adroit attempt completely to turn the tables on the traditionalists, Smith declared that their "higher" view of Scripture was in fact lower.

> It is of the Bible as it exists, and is in our hands, that the Confession throughout speaks. To affirm that former ages had a more perfect Bible than we possess, that our Bible is in the smallest point less truly the Word of God than when it was first written, is clearly to impugn a central interest of our faith on behalf of a mere speculative theory.[196]

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[193] "Answer", p.28.

[194] Ibid.

[195] Ibid., pp.28-29.

[196] Ibid.

For if a Bible containing some errors and imperfections would not have been God's infallible Word when it came from the pen of the original authors, Smith argued, then our Bible, which does contain errors, cannot be God's Word to us now.[197] Psychologically as well as logically, it is a telling point.

But whether Smith or his opponents were right is not the most interesting issue. More interesting is the fact that both he and they tended to argue in the same way. His opponents argued that any doctrine of inspiration which urged less than errorless perfection in every part undermined trust in all parts; he argued that doctrines which require the support of theories about pure originals and faulty copies involved a "sacrifice of the intellect" even more dangerous to faith. Both were defending not so much any particular doctrine of inspiration as the faith which might be imperilled by holding one rather than the other.

In other ways, as well, Smith managed to use his opponents' own devices to confound them. He contended for instance that it was extremely dangerous to assume that in giving us a Bible perfect for His own purpose God must have bestowed on that Bible every other perfection. That would be, he said, for us mere men, "with our little insight into the Divine wisdom, our fallible judgement, and our weak faith", to presume to know what is fitting for God.[198] No less articulate or vehemently than the traditionalists themselves, Smith raised the sword against human arrogance.

> Who are we that we should be wiser than God, and declare that we will not receive His Word upon His own witness to its truth, unless we are allowed to

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[197] Ibid.

[198] Ibid., pp.29-30.

> ascribe a number of arbitrary perfections of our own imagining to the letter which He acknowledges in its admitted imperfection?[199]

God in His wisdom, according to Smith, has apparently seen fit to give us His self-evidencing Word in "a vehicle which contains some marks of human imperfection, some verbal and historical errors."[200] We are not wiser than He is. We have God's Word, as it is, not as we think it ought to be.

In his role as pioneer and martyr of the higher criticism (as Lindsay styled him) Smith was also defender of the faith, often enough against his "more believing" brethren and using weapons from their own armoury. Against them he proclaimed that the Bible as we have it is fully God's word, no less in the "copies" than in the "originals." Besides, to assert what the Bible must be, as against what it actually is, is to judge the wisdom of God.

The important thing, however, is that for Smith the two roles of criticism's martyr and faith's defender were in no way mutually exclusive. Criticism and faith are not opposed but allied. Criticism is not only the honest way of dealing with Scripture, it is the most reverent. Because God has given it to us in a certain form, it is in that form that we must study it. Everyone agrees, Smith maintained, that God's method of conveying His Word to us was not merely mechanical. Everyone agrees that "the original organs of revelation, and the subsequent writers of the record were not mere machines, but exercised a certain human freedom and spontaneity."[201] How far this freedom went, we do not know, he confessed, but the question cannot be settled "by

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[199] Ibid., p.30.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Ibid., p.30.

a priori arguments, and by the irreverent and presumptuous cry that a Bible which is not according to our ideas of the fitness of things, is not a Bible at all."[202] In giving us the Bible as a part of human literature, God has also given us both the right and the duty to examine it as literature and "to determine all its human and literary characteristics by the same methods of research as are applied to the analysis of other ancient books." And these are legitimate and necessary methods of research, because they are dictated by the God-given form of their object.[203]

c. History And Literature Vs. Theology

Smith called the Bible "the autobiography of the Church - the story of a converse with God, in which the saints of old actually lived."[204] It is the business of the Protestant scholar therefore to study every word of Scripture, "not merely by grammar and logic, but in its relation to the life of the writer, and the actual circumstances in which God's word came to him."[205] Because the Bible is a history, all about people in the everyday circumstances of life, there are large passages in it, Smith maintained, especially in the Old Testament, which appear quite deficient in spiritual instruction. "Crude rationalism" often professes to throw these aside, as forming no integral part of the record of the revelation. On the other hand, "a narrowly timid faith" sometimes insists that such passages are as valuable as the Psalms or the Sermon on the Mount. Both views are wrong, Smith contended, and both for the same reason: they forget that

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[202] Ibid.

[203] Ibid.

[204] The Old Testament in the Jewish Church, (1881), p.16.

[205] Ibid.

a Bible which contains words of grace and answers to faith must also contain much that is ordinary history. The right view is that the historical details are our access to the spiritual instruction. The history does not constitute the Revelation but the Revelation cannot be understood apart from a critical study of its history. This is Smith's justification of his historical-literary method: the Bible itself demands it.

Put no stronger or more specifically than that the Bible is a human document as well as a divine declaration and that its humanity must be taken as seriously as its divinity, Smith's doctrine and method could have occasioned little antipathy. All the traditionalists said exactly the same thing. As we shall see, Cunningham was adamant that the actual words of Scripture must be analysed with the strictest care and the best technique, and Bannerman declared without embarrassment that history was the primary means of God's disclosure.

Smith's statement was much stronger and much more specific, however. While he certainly held that the Bible was both human and divine - the conviction, he maintained, was the basis for his critical scholarship - he also held that in the Bible God not only speaks to man but man speaks to God. It is impossible therefore - unless one holds the medieval view "that the whole of Revelation lies in abstract doctrines supernaturally communicated to the intellect and not to the heart" - to understand Scripture without looking at its human side. "Nay the whole business of scholarly exegesis lies with this human side."[206] Smith's language could hardly be more explicit, or more calculated to show exactly the size and nature of the gap that separated him from the older conception. The job of scholarship is to deal solely with

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[206] Ibid., pp.18-20. (Italics are Smith's.)

Scripture's human side. The Bible is not a book of oracles to which men come as occasion demands; nor is it any more to be thought of as a kind of heavenly systematic theology wherein all divine truth is set before us in a perfection of fullness and order. No, the Bible, Smith declared, is "a book of Experimental Religion, in which the converse of God with His people is depicted in all its stages up to the full and abiding manifestation of saving love in the person of Jesus Christ."[207] As an account of God's activity in the lives of men the Bible is a human history; as the expression of men's response to God it is a human literature. To appropriate its message for our hearts we do not need the help of "ecclesiastical tradition" or "authoritative Churchly exegesis."

> All we need is to put ourselves by the side of the Psalmist, the prophet, or the apostle, to enter by spiritual sympathy into his experience, to feel our sin and need as he felt them, and to take home to us, as he took them, the gracious words of divine love.[208]

The means of access to the message of the Bible, according to Smith, in contradiction to his predecessors, is not essentially theological or even linguistic. It is historical and literary, a sympathetic entering into the lives of those to whom the Revelation came in the first instance. By so entering we learn to "understand God's teaching in its natural connection."[209]

d. Hebrew Poetry

Enough has been said on Smith's view of the nature and form of God's revelation of Himself in Scripture to indicate why the study of the Bible must be for him preeminently historical. The Bible is a

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[207] Ibid., pp.13-14.

[208] Ibid., p.14.

[209] Ibid., p.21.

book of history and a book of history cannot be sympathetically understood, or understood at all, apart from historical methods of research.

Smith's defense of a literary approach to the Bible runs along exactly the same lines; that is, it is tied to his conception of the essential nature of God's relationship with man. Insofar as the Bible is an expression of man's response to God (as well as an account of God's actions toward man) it is literature; and insofar as that response is a response of the heart rather than of the head the literature is emotional rather than cerebral, cast usually in the form of poetry. In order to understand the Bible, therefore, we must understand its art. But the character of Old Testament literature is determined perhaps as much by the temperament of the Hebrews as by the essential nature of religion itself. The Hebrew tongue, Smith said in "Bible", is "almost incapable of expressing an abstract idea, or depicting a complex whole with repose and symmetry of parts, but fit to set forth with great subtlety individual phases of nature or feeling."[210] It is well then that religion of the very highest sort, personal and experimental, should first be delivered to a people who were by nature so admirably suited to express it. The Hebrew of the Old Testament was not, to put it mildly, a theoretician.

> To speak with the philosophers, the Hebrew character is one of predominant subjectivity, eager to reduce everything to a personal standard, swift to seize on all that touches the feelings or bears directly on practical wants, capable of intense effort and stubborn persistence where the motive to action is personal affection or desire, but indisposed to theoretical views, unfit for contemplation of things as they are in themselves apart from relation to the thinker.[211]

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[210] Encyclopaedia Britannica, ninth edition, vol. III, p.638.

[211] Ibid.

Although the Hebrew taught, he could not merely teach. Referring to the Wisdom Literature, Smith said that "the Hebrew is a poet even in his philosophy."[212]

It is another of the paradoxes of Smith's personality, or perhaps simply another instance of his extraordinary many-sidedness, that for all his essentially scientific proclivities he displayed a wonderful insight into the poetry of the Hebrews, maybe because he shared something of their feeling for nature. "He had sympathy for nature; but he could with difficulty recognise the National Anthem", as S. A. Cook put it in a happy phrase. "He could declaim rhythmically, and was very sensitive to the cadences of the Arab poets."[213] And nowhere is Smith's poetic insight more evident than in his "little-known article on the Poetry of the Old Testament ('77)," to which Cook properly directs us. In it Smith is himself a demonstration of the thing he wants to teach, namely that the religious experience and the poetic passion are united in genuine devotion, and those who understand the poetry best are those who know the religion from the inside. One passage at least, quoted at length, must be given to demonstrate the empathy which Smith obviously had with both Old Testament literature and New Testament faith.

> The art of the Hebrew is true art to those who can rise to the level of his passion. But religious conviction is supreme where it exists at all. And the aesthetic necessity that all things in heaven and earth shall bend to the Divine purpose of salvation revealed to the poet's faith, is also the ethical necessity on which the whole religious life depends. That the things which are impossible with men are possible with God is the first axiom of a religion that shall rise with triumphant assurance over all the woes of life. To assert with unwavering confidence

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[212] Ibid., p.639

[213] Centenary of the Birth on 8th November 1846 of the Reverend Professor W. Robertson Smith, p.11.

> the victory of spiritual certainties over all empirical contradiction, to vanquish earthly fears in the assurance of transcendental fellowship with God, to lay down for all ages the pattern of a faith which endures as seeing Him who is invisible - such is the great work for which the poetical genius was consecrated by the providence and inspiration of the Most High.[214]

It is a remarkable passage, Smith at his edifying best. And the same quality of exalted prose runs throughout the whole article, almost any section of which might have been singled out for quotation. It could hardly have been written by someone not intimately and personally acquainted with the faith of both the Old and the New Testaments. His conscious use of the language of Hebrews 11 indicates something of the relationship which he believed obtained between the two dispensations. He saw the Old through the New and obviously believed the Scriptures, at least the Psalms, to be planned and inspired by God for both. The article is as much a commentary on Smith's faith as it is "a fine example of his poetic insight", as Cook rightly judged it.

Smith knew the genre inside and out. An illustration of the fact is his commentary on Hebrew secular poetry. Like the last piece quoted it is itself almost lyrical.

> The extraordinary opinion of Keil, that in Israel secular poetry was never able to thrive beside the sacred muse, finds its refutation on almost every page of the prophets and the historical books. Of the strains in which national victories were extolled or national calamity bewailed, we still possess examples in the song of Deborah, in the ironical Mashal of Num. XXI. 27 seq., and in the elegy of David over Saul and Jonathan. . . . The gleeful carols of the vintage, and the bridal songs that celebrate the virgins of Israel, have sunk into oblivion; but the lay of the well, already quoted, still preserves the memory of a graceful poetry of everyday life. Nor is the plaintive pathos of the funeral dirge forgotten, when besides the great elegy on the slain of Gilboa we can still read the simpler but no less touching words in which David mourned

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[214] Lectures and Essays, p.432.

at the grave of Abner:

Did Abner die a felon's death?
Thy hands unbound, thy feet not set in fetters.
As falls a man before villains, thou didst fall.[215]

For all of his sensitivity to the aesthetic qualities of the literature with which he was dealing, however, Smith had little sympathy for the art for art's sake approach to the Bible. For all the stridency with which he demanded the full appreciation of its literary forms, one would not have found him espousing present-day courses in "The Bible as Literature", as if, as such courses are sometimes taught, the literature could somehow be learned apart from the faith which animates it. "True criticism is not the classification of poetic effects according to the principles of rhetoric", he said, "but the unfolding of the living forces which moved the poet's soul."[216] He also seemed to share Herder's sentiment: "Away with all practical application to modern times! Let us see this primeval age, and in it the heart and mind of David and his poets."

Smith was not uncritical of Herder's views, however, or of certain other theories then in vogue. Although he acknowledged that in demanding that the poetry of the Hebrews be studied "according to the laws of historical psychology", Herder had laid down "a principle of permanent importance", he judged that "his application of the principle is marred by many defects."[217] And persuaded as Smith was that "the Israelite never thought of framing a system of theology", he resisted what he called "the worthless modern subjectivity which separates the

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[215] Ibid., pp.440-441.

[216] Ibid., p.406. Smith thought that, in contrast to Herder, Lowth was guided too much by analogies to Western poetry to do full justice to the pecularities of Oriental literature, and that by his divorce of the poetic form from the religious contents of the Old Testament he had "necessarily obscured the true features of the problem." Ibid., p.404.

[217] Ibid., p.407.

religious sentiment from all persuasions of objective realities."[218] Even though the Hebrew's interest in religious truth was not scientific but personal, it was never merely personal, separated from universal truth. Inveterate lyricist that he was, the Israelite was also a teacher. Although it must be said that he did not philosophize, it may also be said that he was never without a philosophy.[219]

Characteristically, Smith showed himself very much a product of the more progressive spirit of his times, but never without reserving for himself the right to assess it. In this instance he would not allow himself to be persuaded that the poetry of the Old Testament could be the mere object of some critic's cold scalpel on the one hand or that the Book of Job could be resolved into "a purely untutored flow of natural feelings, unaided by art and uncoloured by reflection" on the other.[220] The poetry must be felt, even as the poet himself felt it; at the same time it must be seen in its essential relation to the objective truths and the real history it was its purpose always to unfold.

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[218] Ibid., p.442.

[219] Cf. Smith's comments on the didactic poetry of the Old Testament, Ibid., pp.442ff. In a somewhat similar manner Smith argued that the Old Testament really contains no epic, for the reason that the epical poet seeks to separate the present from the past. Not so the Hebrew: his purpose is exactly the opposite. "The Israelite had no desire to isolate a part of past time, adorning it with nobler motives and higher life than subsequent ages could show. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the everlasting God of Israel, as near to His people now as in former days." And so, Smith maintained, even those critics who take a low view of the accuracy of Israel's early history will not deny that it was told in such a way as to emphasise the historical connection of the present with the past. Ibid., p.448.

[220] Ibid., pp.407-408. Smith is eloquent on Job. He describes it as "this quintessence of the religious poetry of Israel" and claims that it "combines the various excellencies of every species of Hebrew art." Ibid., pp.450-451.

The connection, in Smith, between an ability to enter into Hebrew Poetry can hardly be overemphasised. He understood that in order to know the poet's heart one must know the poet's art. Or better perhaps, the other way around, for as Smith himself said, "The art of the Hebrew is true art to those who can rise to the level of his passion." Nonetheless there must be poetic insight, at least an understanding of the nature of Hebrew poetry, if there is to be a full understanding of the nature of Hebrew religion, because the poetry is the expression of the religion. This explains why Herder was important to Smith.[221] It also helps to explain why any view of the Old Testament as a mere compendium of doctrine was offensive to him. Religion is personal, immediate, "poetic": the expression of it must be entered into along with, or along side of, the poet himself.

Smith's insistence that the Old Testament be approached in a literary way is of a piece then with his insistence that the Old Testament be approached in an historical way: one enters into or participates in the encounters of God and men in the past; one does not abstract from them certain truths which those encounters only serve to enunciate or illustrate. Whatever theology men find in the Old Testament is an intellectualisation (it is the ideal word here), a casting into intellectually comprehensible forms that which was not intellectual in the first instance. The thing studied must be studied in accordance with what it is.

The New Testament

This matter of the intellectualisation or theologisation of the Old Testament in what appears to be nothing more than an attempt to cater to medieval Catholic and scholastic Protestant proclivities may

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[221] Smith's debt to Herder is recorded, for the most part, in the same article, Ibid., pp.414-417. His criticism of Herder has already been noted.

provide a starting-point for a brief examination of one of the more interesting aspects of Smith's construction, namely his attitude toward the New Testament.

"Smith's article Bible is very weak on the New Testament", we have recently been told, "and this reflects not merely his own specialisation in the Old Testament but the general weakness of New Testament studies in Scotland."[222] The same commentators suggest that Smith's approach to the New Testament lacked, rather uncharacteristically, clear definition. Although he was occasionally charged with un-traditional views,[223] especially in regard to Christ's attitude to the Old Testament, Smith was, they say, somewhat apprehensive of New Testament criticism, at least in its more radical forms: "It looks as though Robertson Smith rather dreaded the conclusions of the Tübingen school and did not accept them, but did not know how to answer them."[224] There may be something in this analysis. It tends to confirm the impression that Smith was not sure, exactly, what to make of the New Testament. Not that he did not show everywhere a thorough grasp of its contents, but that in some not always definable sense he was not nearly as comfortable with it as he was with the Old. The immediate and no doubt best explanation is, of course, that Smith, as we have been reminded, was an Old Testament and not a New Testament scholar. One must be more

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[222] Drummond and Bulloch, The Church in Late Victorian Scotland: 1874-1900, p.218.

[223] Ibid., pp.60-61. Drummond and Bulloch's precise point in this section is not to show that Smith's views of the New Testament were conspicuously un-traditional. It is to show how little his critical views of the New Testament were noticed by a church which was, as they apparently think, too concerned to protect the Old. Nonetheless their remarks support the point being made here, that when Smith's views on the New Testament were noticed, they were regarded as more critical than traditional.

[224] Ibid., p.218.

cautious in judging Smith in this regard than in judging most men, but perhaps even he could not do everything.

There may be other explanations however, one of which has to do with the essentially non-theological character of the Old Testament and the impropriety of dealing with it in an essentially theological way. The fact that there is much in the New Testament that is patently theological may have been a problem for Smith, theologically, psychologically, or methodologically, or perhaps all three. That is, the stuff of the New Testament would not be as congenial as that of the Old Testament to an analysis of the sort he practised, so firmly rooted as it was in his convictions about the nature of faith and the nature of the Bible.

Not that Smith thought the New Testament so thoroughly theological that he was unable to apply his method to it. On the contrary, the synoptic gospels in their historicalness were, as he saw it, a vindication of his method. Once, in a comparison of the early creeds with the New Testament documents he remarked:

> In place of such abstract and theoretical discussion, the Bible sets before us the living Christ in experimental manifestation, as He actually lived and taught, suffered and rose again; it sets before us the Father, Son, and Spirit as revealed in the actual work of redemption, and in that multiplicity of relations to man which forms the experimental basis of all dogmatic speculation on the Divine Being.[225]

It remains true nevertheless that most of the New Testament is theological in a way in which none of the Old Testament is, and, by so much as it is, it demands different handling.

Interestingly, Smith's most extended comment on the New Testament comes in "Bible", the row over which quickly centered on Deuteronomy.

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[225] The Old Testament in the Jewish Church, (1881), p.11. Cf. Lectures and Essays, p.121.

The fact itself perhaps says something about the character of Smith's attitude to the New Testament. That is, even though he discussed the New Testament, and at some length, it was not his comments on it that was his chief offense. He could be cited only for being "neutral", as the original libel framed it. He was not, it must have appeared, decidedly against, but neither was he convincingly for. Although he seemed to be attacking traditional strongholds, he moved with just enough hesitation to befuddle any well articulated counterattack.

The New Testament, Smith said, was born in an era when the apocalyptic hope had not died away. Therefore: "The Messianic hopes already current among the first hearers of the gospel were unquestionably of apocalyptic colour."[226] The Book of Revelation in its dependence on Daniel, he argued, is the clearest evidence that this is so. And in an interesting side comment which perfectly illustrates the instability of trends in biblical scholarship he urged that Revelation "is at least an undisputed monument of the prophecy of the apostolic age (according to modern critics, earlier than the fall of Jerusalem)."[227] Revelation should be dated before 70 AD because it is so closely related to Daniel and the era of apocalyptic. In the light of later scholarship it is an interesting point of view.

But Smith's sentiments were not governed by the latest critical theories, not entirely at any rate. The influence on Christianity of Hellenistic philosophy and, in general, "that floating spirit of speculation which circulated at the time in the meeting-places of Eastern and Western thought", as he put it, was for the most part later than the New Testament period. Moreover:

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[226] "Bible", Encyclopaedia Britannica, ninth edition, vol. III, p.642.

[227] Ibid. (Italics are Smith's.)

> That the gospel of John presents a view of the person of Christ dependent on Philonic speculation is not exegetically obvious, but is simply one side of the assertion that this gospel is an unhistorical product of abstract reflection. In the same way other attacks on the genuineness of New Testament writings are backed up by the supposed detection of Orphic elements in the epistle of James, and so forth.[228]

While setting out the critical positions, Smith at the same time had indicated that they were not without their doubtful aspects. It seems a fair and objective analysis.

Smith was writing here for an organ devoted to "knowledge rather than opinion", as Baynes, the Britannica's editor, had made clear in his preface, and so was exercising a certain prerogative to refrain from entering into theological controversy. Indeed that was part of the defense of his neutrality which he made in his statement to the College Committee.[229] But whatever his obligations to impartiality, the tepidity of his remarks could not but be provoking. One of his severer critics made the most of it. "If Mr. Smith meant to condemn an opinion concerning the Gospel of John so utterly inconsistent with any respect for it as a portion of the Word of God, why did he not do so in plain and decided language?"[230] The criticism is fair enough. Phrases such as "not exegetically obvious" and "the supposed detection of Orphic elements" are barely convincing that Smith meant to say anything against the critical theories at all. But of course he did. The mere fact that he took them up, even in this somewhat delicate fashion, is the evidence – and precisely the source of complaint.

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[228] Ibid. As a student Smith once referred to John as "that Gospel which is the direct record of an apostle's experience." Lectures and Essays, p.158.

[229] Report of the College Committee, pp.18ff.

[230] "An Examination of Articles Contributed by Professor W. Robertson Smith to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the Expositor, and the British Quarterly Review in relation to the Truth, Inspiration, and Authority of the Holy Scriptures", by a Minister of the Free Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: James Gemmell, 1877), p.51.

The "neutrality" of Smith's comments on the New Testament is the more conspicuous because they are set against the background of his comments on the Old. Having read Smith's section on the Old Testament and felt their general drift, the reader comes to the section on the New. Therein he senses a different attitude. Whereas in the first part of his article Smith had made it plain that the truth of the critical theories could hardly be denied, in the second part he seems not so sure.

Smith maintained that the earliest currents of Christian life and thought "stood in a very secondary relation to the intellectual activity of the period", and that the only books from which the early church drew freely were those of the Old Testament. But he also argued that the task of proclaiming the gospel was not in the first instance a literary task at all: the epistles therefore were occasional pieces which <u>became</u> the literary vehicle for Christian thought.[231] As for the synoptic gospels, Smith held to the tradition that Matthew wrote in Aramaic but that what he wrote is not the gospel as we now have it: what now bears his name was taken from his collection of Christ's sayings, but this process of redaction came later than the apostles themselves. From this it appears that the synoptical gospels are "non-apostolic digests of spoken and written apostolic tradition" and that the arrangement of the earlier material took place only gradually.[232]

Smith's opinion is that a considerable portion of the New Testament is made up of writings "not directly apostolical", and that "as a matter of fact, every book in the New Testament, with the exception of the four great epistles of St. Paul, is at present more or less the subject

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[231] <u>Encyclopaedia Britannica</u>, ninth edition, vol. III, p.642 (Italics mind).

[232] <u>Ibid</u>., p.643.

of controversy, and interpolations are asserted even in these."[233]

But at the same time, in what appears to be a mitigation of this fairly strong language, Smith pointed out that "the arguments directed by modern critics against the genuiness or credibility of New Testament books do not for the most part rely much on external evidence" and added:

> On the whole, . . . on the most cardinal points, the external evidence for the New Testament books is as strong as can fairly be looked for, though not, of course, strong enough to convince a man who is sure a priori that this or that book is unhistorical and must be of a late date.[234]

Everywhere there is this precarious balance between yes and no. It is best illustrated perhaps in what is his boldest foray against the most negative (Smith's word) of the New Testament critics, those of the Tübingen School. After helpfully explaining the Tübingen theory, he put to it four questions, the fourth of which is the most damaging: "Whether the external evidence for the several books and the known facts of church history leave time for the successive evolution of all the stages of early Christianity which the theory postulates?"[235]

Probably Smith answered the Tübingen school as well and as forthrightly as he answered anyone in "Bible." In fact it is quite an articulate and effective answer, graced as it is with a certain scholarly detachment and courtesy. And indeed if he anywhere transgressed the Encyclopaedia's commitment to objectivity it was here. The irony is that just where he might have gained with the traditionalists he loses.

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[233] Ibid.

[234] Ibid., p.644.

[235] Ibid.

The courtesy he afforded the Tübingen School he seemed to grudge to them. There is an unevenness or imbalance between his review of Old and New Testament studies. With the Old Testament he is young and aggressive, pretty sure that new is best; with the New Testament he is older and more cautious, still persuaded, certainly, that forward is the way, but not with the same enthusiasm for the pace - so that even when he occasionally resists current trends in New Testament criticism he cannot please his more conservative brethren.

There are a number of possible explanations for his occasional resistance. One is that although he obviously knew his way around in it, New Testament criticism was not his speciality. The importance of this fact should not be underestimated. Another explanation might be that for Smith many of the arguments of the New Testament critics simply were not convincing. That is, after all, what he said. But a third might be that the stakes involved in a radical re-appraisal of the New Testament are much higher than those involved in a similar re-appraisal of the Old. Because for Smith Christ and the gospel are not only the end and fulfilment of the Old Testament - which allows him to be somewhat freer with that which is merely its foreshadowing - but as such they provide the very basis upon which his Old Testament criticism works. George Adam Smith said that Christ was the Old Testament's first critic and so justified his own procedure. William Robertson Smith never said that Christ actually "criticised" the Old Testament, nor, probably, would he have done. Nevertheless it was "the authority of Christ and all the difference he has made" (as George Adam Smith put it in a discussion of precisely this issue) that informs all of Robertson Smith's criticism. He was a believing Christian critic of the Old Testament. Therefore there might have been for him very special difficulties attending any criticism of the New Testament.

He may not have been quite as free to assume a more or less objective stance toward it as he did toward the Old, because in it he has not merely historians, poets and prophets, but Christ Himself.[236] Smith never actually analysed the critical attacks directed at the New Testament. At least once, as we have seen, he took it upon himself to point out what were clearly the flaws in a certain school of New Testament Criticism, but he did not examine the arguments in depth or, more important, address himself to the question of how or whether the same general type of critical procedure which he so heartily advocated with regard to the Old Testament should be applied to the New.

Old Testament And New Testament

The lack of strong conviction which characterises Smith's handling of the New Testament may have been due to some uncertainties about the precise nature of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. For although his view of the relationship between the dispensations is on the whole workable and often even traditional, it is occasionally marred by what appear to be certain inconsistencies and ambiguities.

According to Smith the history of the Old Testament must be taught (1) "as the history of the preparation for Christ without which much of His teaching cannot be understood" and (2) "as the visible illustration and proof of many things which, though involved in Christ's

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[236]The relationship between Old and New Testament criticism had its other dimensions as well. "Before the Robertson Smith controversy (1876-81), the radical nature of continental criticism of the New Testament caused Englishmen to identify higher criticism with naturalism and infidelity; Old Testament criticism suffered from the excesses of the New Testament critics and was not given a fair hearing." Willis B. Glover, Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century, (London: Independent Press, 1954), p.69. Besides prejudicing the case against Old Testament criticism, the fact no doubt also served to aggravate the question of whether or not the New Testament could be criticised at all without denying cardinal doctrines.

work, did not in His life on earth receive detailed manifestation."[237] It is an interesting way of applying the usual formula: even though Christ in the New Testament is the fulfilment on a spiritual level of that which in the Old Testament is only a foreshadowing, and even though there will come a time when Christ's Kingdom will be actually realised, the events of the Old Testament alone give us "clear illustrations" of the spiritual things of the New. "For example, the power to overthrow His enemies by angelic help, which Jesus claims but did not use, is the same power which was manifested in the fall of Sennacherib's host."[238] The use of the Old Testament is "to make the spiritual, heavenly world appear real to those we teach", for "this sense of God's immediate presence to all our lives" is that which characterises preeminently, the whole of the Old Testament.[239] In a sense the Old Testament is more a book of "realities" and "immediacies" - because it is more a book of history - than the New Testament is. In the same sense it might be said that while it does not always speak to us of things in their fulness, it always speaks to us of them in their actuality.

In a similarly interesting way Smith explained why, in his view, the Old Testament is more historical than the New. It is because in the study of the New Testament we are assisted by a large contemporary profane literature for which we have no counterpart in the study of the Old. A wise Providence has therefore seen fit to provide us, in the Old Testament itself, with a much larger proportion of information which is primarily of historical or archeological interest, even though

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[237] Lectures and Essays, p.291.

[238] Ibid. Cf. pp.282-283.

[239] Ibid., pp.291-292.

it does not directly serve the purpose of edification.[240] The details of the Old Testament are God's provision for us, the stuff of a historical and critical study, intended by Him to be the means by which we apprehend His working in the world. The New Testament does not give us as many helps because they are supplied from other sources. In both however, albeit in different ways, God has given us the means of carrying out a critical study of His word, because a critical study is the means by which His Word is to be understood. Nicely, Smith has shown how the essentially historical character of the Old Testament is really "meant" for the approach he wants to make to it. By the same token the New Testament is also meant for a historical approach, although most of its history is found outside the books themselves.

It is an ingenious argument. But might it not be turned around? Might it not be argued that because the New Testament does not itself supply us with such a mass of historical and archeological details, God did not intend us to approach it historically; and that such historical details as the Old Testament does supply are meant to be taken in some other way, perhaps as the "crude rationalists" or those of "a narrowly timid faith" might take them?

Whatever the criticisms of Smith's analysis on this particular score, he nonetheless saw the Old Testament as a preparation for the New. And in anticipation of what is apparently a modern vexation over "the great importance of the Old Testament in the mind of the Free Church",[241] Smith declared that "Our Scottish love for the Old Testament does not proceed from adherence to a legal or a Judaising standpoint,

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[240] The Old Testament in the Jewish Church (1881), pp.16-17.

[241] Drummond and Bulloch, The Church in Late Victorian Scotland, 1874-1900, p.60.

but from the belief that in the Old Testament as in the New, Christ and the truths of His gospel are set forth with Divine authority."[242] The proof is that it was the Old Testament (the New Testament Canon having not yet been formed) that Paul said was able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, and that it was the Old Testament of which Christ Himself drank and to which He attached His teaching, finding "foreshadowed in the Books of the Old Covenant every-thing which in His own person and history is now expressed in verity."[243] Insofar then as it is preparation for it, the Old Testament must always occupy a place side by side with the New.[244] Such is, as Smith believed, the historic Protestant interpretation of the relationship between the two Testaments: God in Christ is the full manifestation of the Divine Revelation; therefore the New cannot be understood apart from the Old, but neither can the Old be understood except in the light of the New, because in this process of progressive unfolding, this history of salvation, the beginning is made clear only at the end.[245]

This way of solving the problem of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments is acceptable enough, and would have been acceptable to anyone with whom Smith, on other issues, might have been in conflict. On other occasions however he spoke of the matter in quite a different way. Addressing himself once to the seventh of the Thirty-Nine Articles (the Old Testament is not contrary to the New), he said that in a sense of course the statement is true - providing it

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[242] Lectures and Essays, p.285.

[243] Ibid., pp.285-286.

[244] Ibid., p.286. "The history of Israel is part of the history of the faith by which we live, the New Testament cannot be rightly understood without understanding the Old, and the main reason why so many parts of the Old Testament are practically a sealed book even to thoughtful people is simply that they have not the historical key to the interpretation of that wonderful literature." Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Israel, with preface by W. Robertson Smith, p. vii.

[245] Lectures and Essays, pp.127-129.

is understood that (1) the hope of the Old Testament is a national, not an individual hope and that (2) Christ is not found in the Old Testament.[246] It is the second of these qualifications that is striking, because it seems so obviously inconsistent with his belief that "in the Old Testament as in the New, Christ and the truths of His gospel are set forth with Divine authority." Christ could not be found in the Old Testament, Smith maintained in this later essay, except by the introduction of a system of allegory, or at least a theory of types and symbols, and this, he said, was "not fair exegesis."

It is plain that Smith is again simply drawing the distinction between a critical and a dogmatic approach to the Old Testament, or as he more often put it, a Reformation and a medieval approach. For as he went on to say: "It is absurd to assume that, side by side with the written Word there ran through the Old Dispensation an unwritten system of interpretation which made that Word mean something different from what lies on its surface."[247] Smith's primary concern here was to call a halt to the practice of reading back into the Old Testament things which may be apparent enough in the New Testament, but which, on the basis of any simply reading of its words and an understanding of its circumstances, could not have been intended by the original authors. That this is Smith's concern is clear from remarks he made on the following page. In what might be read as his commentary on I Peter 1.10ff., he said:

> When the New Testament affirms that the prophets spoke of Christ they refer to the application which these words naturally suggested, not to their Old Testament hearers, but to Christian readers. The point, therefore, is not that the Old Testament writers promised salvation in

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[246] "The Attitude of Christians to the Old Testament", The Expositor, second series, vol. VII, 1884, p.243.

[247] Ibid.

> Christ, but that they promised - no matter in what form - a salvation which is only realized in Christ.[248]

In the first of his lectures on The Prophets of Israel Smith made exactly the same point. The fact that God's work of salvation is one from first to last, and that Christ is the centre of all revelation, led to the idea that the Old Testament believers looked to a personal Messiah as distinctly, if not as clearly, as did the New Testament Church. This idea, Smith maintained, involved the study of the old dispensation in extraordinary difficulties, the worst of which was that since the Old Testament contains "no explicit declaration in plain words" of the cardinal New Testament truths about Christ, it was necessary to suppose that the men of the Old Covenant possessed some sort of key to the symbolism of the sacred ordinances which enabled them to draw a meaning from the language of the Prophets and the Psalms about the coming Saviour which did not lie on the surface of the words themselves. This reference to a "hidden sense" was the practise which the Reformers rejected.[249] Smith's point is well taken. Sound exegesis demands that language be read and interpreted as it stands, giving due consideration to its literary and historical context. It must be approached, that is, critically and not dogmatically.

Still, the discrepancy between his earlier and his later comments remains. It might be explained partly in terms of the difference between the circumstances in and the precise purpose for which each was made. The earlier were made primarily to Sunday School teachers for the purpose of explaining why and how the Old Testament ought to be taught, especially to children, with principal stress being laid on its

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[248] Ibid., p.244. Smith briefly discusses I Peter 1.10-12 in Lectures and Essays, p.261.

[249] The Prophets of Israel (1882), pp.4-6.

importance, and the necessity, therefore, to teach it well. The later were made, in both Prophets and The Expositor, to a theologically more sophisticated audience for the purpose, at least in part, of vindicating not only his views of the Old Testament, but his right to approach it as he did, vis-a-vis the older conception. Thus in some sense perhaps it was right to say in the first case that the Old Testament is important because in it we find Christ and His gospel and in the second case to say that Christ is not (actually) found in the Old Testament.

Or, the discrepancy may be seen as simply a change of opinion on Smith's part. The address to the Sabbath School convention was given in 1871 just following his appointment to the Chair in Aberdeen, the Prophets series was delivered in the Winter of 1881 just following his removal from his Chair, and The Expositor article written three years after that when he was settled in Cambridge. The gap between the first and the last two was ten years at least, plenty of time for a development of ideas and, perhaps, reason enough for a change of mind.

More probably, however, the resolution should be sought in what is perhaps, overall, the dominating motif in Smith's theological method, that, namely, of the historically progressive character of God's plan of salvation. The difficulty of bringing the theological and the historical aspects of prophecy together, he said in a lecture entitled "Prophecy as a Factor in History", cannot be conquered by "merely shutting our eyes to the lower and transitory elements in the phenomena of prophecy, and spiritualising everything that does not fit at once into the Christian scheme." For the real difficulty about prophecy does not lie in any one institution of the Old Testament, but in the fact that the Christian dispensation was preceded by an old dispensation at all.

> Unless we are prepared to throw away the Old Testament altogether, and to say with ancient and modern Gnostics that the God of the Jews is not the God of Christians, we must face the fact that from Moses to Christ all knowledge of the true God and His plan of Salvation was encased in local, national, temporary, earthly forms. The limitations of prophecy are the historical limitations of the whole dispensation, and from these limitations prophecy could not have been freed without ceasing to be Old Testament prophecy at all.[250]

Because of man's incapacity to receive spiritual truth, except gradually, God accommodatingly preceded Christianity with "an imperfect dispensation", given under the conditions of men's "actual historical position and needs." Looking at it in this light, we can perhaps see how Christ can be in the Old Testament at the same time as He is not in it, and begin to appreciate something of how we ought to understand the Old Testament as it is on its own and also as it is in its relationship to the fuller revelation which succeeded it in the record of the New.

As Smith said:

> We cannot understand the Old Testament dispensation, either in its own internal unity or in its unity with the New Testament, except in this way of always looking at each step in the development for a human continuity whereby the new advance in the carrying out of God's plan of Revelation and redemption fits into the general progress of history.[251]

The relationship between the Old Testament and the New is by any reckoning an enormously difficult problem, and Smith has most discerningly put his finger on the fundamental issue, namely that it is not any single institution of the Old Testament which is the cause of the perplexity, but why there should have been an old dispensation at all. The question remains however whether or not Smith has dealt satisfactorily with the original problem of how Christ is savingly "set forth" in the

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[250] Lectures and Essays, p.346.

[251] Ibid., p.347.

Old Testament as Smith said He was, and as the New Testament writers, indeed Christ Himself, at least on the face of it, seemed to think He was.[252]

Prophecy And Prophets

The link between the Old and New dispensations, in Smith's view, was the prophets; and in his emphasis on the signal importance of the prophets he shared one of the major tenets of the re-evaluation of the Old Testament by the continental critics.[253] The solution to "the problem of the interpretation of the prophets" is therefore the solution to the larger problem of the significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Church.[254] And insofar as it is, how Smith dealt with it is fundamental to the matter of the relationship between his Old Testament Criticism and his New Testament faith. The question is, to what extent was the manifestation of God in Christ the realisation of what the prophets foretold? Or as Smith himself put it:

> How far is the constitution of Christ's kingdom identical with, and how far merely analogous to, the constitution of David's kingdom? . . . Or, on the other hand, in what measure is the New Testament dispensation not merely an elevation - an idealisation - of the Old Testament but something really and qualitatively new, which the Old Testament only shadowed forth without presenting essential identity or even such an identity that the one can flow from the other by mere regular growth?[255]

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[252]The case against Smith on this score is forcefully put by J. Smith in "Professor Smith on the Bible", pp.22ff., quoted in Drummond and Bulloch, The Church in Late Victorian Scotland, 1874-1900, p.61.

[253]On the central role of the prophets in the higher criticism, see conveniently R. E. Clements, A Century of Old Testament Study (London: Lutterworth Press, 1976), pp.51ff. Cf. Smith's own remarks in Lectures and Essays, p.166.

[254]Lectures and Essays, pp.259-260.

[255]Ibid.

a. Literalists And Psychologists

As might be expected from one whose view of Scripture had somewhat the character of a via media, Smith opposed extreme views, on either side, of the interpretation of prophecy. He opposed the literal interpretation "which forbids the application of any dialectic whatever to the prophetic books, which allows no distinction between essence and form, no development in the Old Testament theology except by simple addition." He also opposed the historical-psychological interpretation, "which finds the explanation of every oracle solely in the historical position and natural mental experience of the prophet, . . . "[256] Neither extreme, he said, can satisfy the theologian who desires a view of prophecy which - Smith's language is important here - "shall form an organic member in the system of the theology of the Church."[257]

The problem is that while the New Testament writers saw Christ as the fulfilment of all that the prophets had foretold, the prophets themselves, being men of their times, had cast much of their vision for the future in forms drawn from their own surroundings. So that even though the prophets "are always able to rise from the consideration of God's dealings with their contemporaries to the ideal manifestation of the same divine principles of government in the consummation of all things", the questions remain: "how far circumstances of the new dispensation render the hopes of that preceding invalid; where the line is to be drawn between the changing form and the permanent substance of prophecy; and further, what are the principles on which the changes of form depend."[258]

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[256] Ibid., pp.256-257.

[257] Ibid., p.257.

[258] Ibid., pp.265-266.

Generally speaking, the answer which Smith gave is that the true fulfilment of prophecy is spiritual. The revelations which the prophet received were usually temporal and therefore partial: he saw his vision of a heavenly kingdom against a background of contemporary theocratic institutions. We must then, he said, always aim at distinguishing this mere background from the spiritual hopes and promises that rose from it.[259] Smith confessed that this distinction was not always easy to make in detail. But he maintained that even if they could conceive of God's presence with redeemed man only in a form derived from Jehovah's glory enthroned on the cherubim and so forth, the prophets themselves, finding the spiritual things of their prophecies accomplished in Christ in a fuller sense and without these accessories, would have "rejoiced to acknowledge that in Him the true fulfilment of their oracles is found."[260] In other words the prophets would have been glad to see in Christ the fulfilment of their prophecies, even if the fulfilment did not come in exactly the terms in which they had cast their prophecies.

Interpreting Christ's fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy in a spiritual way gave Smith the freedom to steer a middle course between the literalist interpretation on the one hand and the merely psychological or historical interpretation on the other. At the same time it allowed him the liberty to lean in the direction of either extreme as occasion might demand.[261] It allowed him to argue that as God's purpose gradually unfolds in human history the hopes of the prophets may again and again receive partial fulfilments, in addition to their final fulfilment.

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[259] Ibid., pp.279-280.

[260] Ibid., p.280.

[261] Smith himself said that on some points of detail the Christian theologian "may approach either the one or the other view." Ibid., p.257.

"But neither the final not the partial fulfilments will exactly fit into the setting which the prophet drew from his own surroundings."[262] Thus could Smith take up a thoroughly critical approach to the prophecies without denying either that Christ was, in some sense, their literal fulfilment or that they had received temporal and therefore necessarily partial fulfilment as well.

"The prophets prophesied into the future", Smith argued, "but not directly to the future. Their duties lay with their own age, and cnly by viewing them as they move amidst their contemporaries does the critic learn to love and admire them."[263] This is the credo, fairly, of the believing critic. He criticised in order to love and admire. Although, as in the case of the second half of Isaiah, those who come at it from a strictly theological standpoint - "taking the prophet on the Divine side" - may be able to explain some things the critic does not understand, still, the critic must not be denied the right to test the phenomena in his own way, "to transpose the unintelligible utterance into a different setting, to ask whether, so transposed, it may not become doubly resplendent with the twofold brilliancy of an eternal Divine thought and a manifest historical propriety."[264] Spiritual resplendence and historical propriety, and both, perhaps, enhanced - this is the proper end of true criticism, as distinguishable from that which seems not to concern itself seriously with the hard facts of history as it is from "the old rationalistic absurdity of bringing down all prophecy post eventum."[265]

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[262] Ibid., p.265.

[263] Ibid., p.180.

[264] Ibid., p.181.

[265] Ibid.

b. Prophecy And History

Smith claimed that "of all the monuments of Israel's history, the most precious by far to the critical student are the Old Testament prophecies, . . . "[266] The reason is that in the prophets is found this combination of religious zeal which is bound up with the actual life of the times and a spirituality which transcends time and place and witnesses therefore to a more profound religiousness. So that even though, as Smith believed, much Old Testament history is not contemporary and not always accurate - a fact, as Smith also believed, which had been overplayed by German rationalists inclined to distrust accounts of miracle anyway - we have in the prophets a better history because we have religious history.[267] It is then, from a critical point of view, not to the historical but to the prophetical books of the Bible that we turn for the truest history, because the prophets undeniably wrote out of their own times, as many of the historians probably did not do. The prophetic writings, Smith said, "are the true key to the marvellous religious development, which is, in fact, the kernel of all Israel's history."[268]

Smith agreed that the tendency of the critical school was to overvalue the historical importance of the prophets at the expense of books "properly historical."[269] Nonetheless the importance of the prophets for him too was in this their double character of being historical, but, also, as it were, beyond history. While the prophet always pointed Israel towards an end which "in its realisation lost the idea of the nation in that of the universal Kingdom of God, and swallowed up the

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[266] Ibid., p.166.

[267] Ibid., pp.166-167.

[268] Ibid., p.166.

[269] Ibid.

Old Testament in the New", he never lost his rootedness in the comparatively petty concerns of his country and people. In fact his Messianic hope and the needs of his own time are bound together: "The highest provisions of the prophet are inextricably intertwined with the narrowest limitations of his historical standpoint: and if we lose hold of the one side we shall never be able to apprehend the other."[270]

Smith regarded prophecy as "the main agency by which God carried on His work in Israel, and led up to Christ."[271] In an important sense then, to understand prophecy in particular is to understand the Divine Revelation in general: it is progressive, always moving toward Christ; it is partial, always bound by the limitations of time and place. Seen from this perspective, the Old Testament is eminently and legitimately "criticisable" - because only in understanding it in a critical way can we come to appreciate the spiritual and eternal things for which Israel's history, seen best in the prophets, provides a kind of temporal analogue.

For the same reasons the question of whether or not prophetic predictions have been literally fulfilled is more or less irrelevant: at least for Smith it is certainly not the main question. Since true prophecy has primarily to do with that which is beyond itself, since the temporal is really only the means of the spiritual, it is not proper to ask of it, as of first importance, if its forecasts of events have come true. If they have or if they have not proves nothing. It is perfectly conceivable, Smith maintained, that we might have the most remarkable prediction of details verified in the most literal ways by

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[270] Ibid., p.248-249.

[271] Ibid., p.247.

subequent events and yet in this prediction receive no revelation of the heart and purpose of God, and have therefore no real prophecy at all. By the same token it is possible that a prophet might have a real message from God to men, enabling them to act under an intelligent comprehension of His purpose, and yet the outcome of that guidance might take a shape which was not literally described by the prophet in advance.[272] In other words the inspiration of prophecy is not proven by its miraculousness but by the extent to which it brings men into contact with the mind and person of God. Its inspiration can be determined only in connection with its purpose.

> The question of the fulfilment of prophecy is not the first question to be taken up in dealing with prophetic inspiration, but the last. Instead of forming our ideal of prophecy from the empirical facts, let us remember that the empirical details are only intelligible in the light of the idea of prophecy.[273]

Smith's language was often much stronger, however. Commenting on attempts to interpret the predictions of the prophets in a literal way he said:

> If the vindication of the divine mission of the prophets of Israel must be sought in the precision of detail with which they related beforehand the course of coming events, the hopes which Isaiah continued to preach during the victorious advance of Sennacherib must be reckoned as vain imagination.[274]

Stronger still: "Not only have Isaiah's predictions received no literal fulfilment, but it is impossible that the evolution of the divine purpose can ever again be narrowed within the limits of the petty world of which Judah was the centre and Egypt and Assyria the extremes."[275]

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[272] Ibid., pp.353-354.

[273] Ibid., p.355. (Italics are Smith's.)

[274] The Prophets of Israel (1882), p.336. The precise relationship between Isaiah's prediction and the detail of Sennacherib's campaign(s) is set out in notes on pp.431-435.

[275] Ibid., p.337.

Only "fanciful theorists who use the Old Testament as a book of curious mysteries", may still dream of Palestine being restored to the seat of universal sovereignty. "The forms in which Isaiah enshrined his spiritual hopes are broken", he said, "and cannot be restored; they belong to an epoch of history that can never return, . . ."[276] To think that it ever could return, Smith argued, is to sacrifice every law of sound hermenuetics and sober historical judgement; such is obvious to "all but a few fantastic Millenarians, whose visions deserve no elaborate refutation."[277]

c. Prophecy And Poetry

The roots of Smith's opposition to literalistic interpretations of prophecy go deeper, however, than a mere reaction to attempts to fix the fulfilment of predictions in places where he thought it absurd to fix them. For Smith not only believed that Palestine simply could not ever again have the significance it once had, he also believed that prophetic language, in its reference to specific times and places, was not to be taken in a literal sense at all. Such references were but the literary vehicle for delivering a spiritual vision. The vision, not the vehicle, was what mattered. To return to Isaiah:

> At every point his insight into the actual position of affairs, his judgement on the sin of Judah and the right path of amendment, his perception of the true sources of danger and the true way of deliverance, had that certainty and clear decisiveness which belong only to a vision purged from the delusions of sense by communion with things eternal and invisible. But when he embodied his faith and hope in concrete pictures of the future, these pictures were, from the necessity of the case, not literal forecasts of history, but poetic and ideal constructions.[278]

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[276] Ibid., p.338.

[277] Ibid.

[278] Ibid., p.341.

In these "dramatic pictures", as Smith called them, it is only artistic or poetical truth that can be looked for. The insight of the prophet, like that of the unprophetic dramatist, vindicates itself in the delineation of true motives, "in the representation of the actual forces that rule the evolution of human affairs", not in the exact reproduction of any one stage of past or future history.[279] The genius of the prophet is that he is able, or enabled, to "gather into one focus" what is actually spread over the ages and to picture the realisation of the divine plan as completed in a single historical event. At the same time the prophet's insight is not proven in that event. Even though Isaiah's prediction, in this case with reference to Sennacherib, was not literally fulfilled, the reality of Isaiah's faith and God's final victory is no less sure.

> Isaiah's faith was already victorious over the world, and had proved itself a source of invincible steadfastness, of peace and joy which the world could not take away, when it raised him high above the terrors and miseries of the present, and filled his mouth with triumphant praises of Jehovah's salvation in the depth of Judah's anguish and abasement . . . . For though the victory of divine righteousness came not at once in that complete and final form which Isaiah pictured, it was none the less a real victory. When the storm rolled away, the word of Jehovah and the community of the faith of Jehovah still remained established on Mount Zion, a pledge of better things to come, a living proof that Jehovah's kingdom ruleth over all, and that though His grace tarry long it can never come to nought, and must yet go forth triumphant to all the ends of the earth.[280]

How to handle prophecy in its predictive aspect is obviously a vexation, especially for the Christian scholar who desires a view of prophecy which, as Smith put it, "shall form an organic member in the system of the theology of the Church." Making prophecy fit or work in the overall scheme of what the believer knows to be God's eternal

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[279] Ibid., pp.341-342.

[280] Ibid., pp.343-344.

purpose in Christ is the problem. It was a problem to which Smith had to give an answer no less than those whose answer, developed according to "official types of prophetic exegesis", as he called it, he rejected.[281] The question is whether or not his answer is any better, or indeed fundamentally any different, than theirs. Both he and they are in some sense, in their own ways, attempting to "save", in this case, Isaiah. And rightly so: it is a task altogether proper to theology. But has not Smith done it in a manner which is not absolutely distinguishable from that of those whom he opposed? Unlike the literalists Smith has refused to give the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy an historical reference. But like them he has given it a future reference. So that to the extent that the prophecy remains unfulfilled it is predictive, if only of spiritual things to come. And what of those elements in Isaiah's prophecy which are not so much unfulfilled as apparently wrong? Our ability to see in retrospect the depth and breadth of Isaiah's spiritual vision notwithstanding, would Isaiah himself have agreed that even if his prediction did not come true God was sovereign anyway? Smith said that Isaiah would have agreed: "There was no self-delusion in the confidence with which he proclaimed Jehovah's victory amidst the crash of the Palestinian cities and the advance of Sennacherib from conquest to conquest"[282] - because eventually Isaiah's faith was vindicated, in the catastrophe which befell the Assyrian army at the very gates of Jerusalem.[283]

It must be confessed that Smith is not absolutely clear at this point. Is he saying that the triumph of Isaiah's faith is in its ability to rise above the defeats of his people to a greater, because

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[281] Ibid., p.339.

[282] Ibid., p.343.

[283] Ibid., p.352.

spiritual, victory of God and good over evil - even if he had pictured that ultimate victory in terms of national victories which were never actually realised? Or is he saying that the triumph of Isaiah's faith is in his ability to believe God for an actual temporal and national victory in the teeth of a series of defeats which seemed to foreclose the possibility of there ever being such an actual victory?

Smith's answer seems somehow to be both, both that Isaiah's faith was literally vindicated in actual events and that the vindication of Isaiah's faith must not be looked for in the literal working out of the details of his predictions but in the spiritual faith of which the predictions were only the form. The true significance of the work of the prophets, Smith said, must be sought, not in whether their forecasts came true but "in the principles of faith which are common to all spiritual religion." The difference between Isaiah and his predecessors however was that "he was permitted to enter in no small degree into the fruit of his own labours, and that the patient endurance of forty years was at least crowned by his personal participation in a victory of faith which produced wide and lasting affects on the subsequent course of Old Testament history."[284]

d. A Middle Way

In his attempt to avoid the extremes of the literalist interpretation on the one hand and the historical-psychological on the other, Smith has sometimes, as he recognised theologians might well do on

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[284] Ibid., p.344. In an interesting parallel Smith once argued that the fulfilment - or non-fulfilment - of prophecy is a kind of illustration of the way God answers prayer. "The most certain answers to prayer are often not those in which God's help comes just in the form in which we asked it, but those in which God answers the spirit of our prayer by denying the letter of it. . . . The case of prophecy is quite of the same kind. . . . That the hopes and prayers of the Old Testament Church have in Christianity often been fulfilled in a form and in concrete details which the prophets never thought of, and could not even have conceived under the limitations of the Old Testament standpoint, is a matter of no moment if the fulfilment is spiritually adequate." Lectures and Essays, pp.355-356.

points of detail, approached one or the other view. Whether or not he has convincingly steered a middle course remains a question. The most serious difficulty with his construction would appear to be his failure to come to terms with the fact-ness or historical rootedness of so much of the prophecy - its plain predictiveness, which the older school perhaps emphasised too much or emphasised wrongly. The failure would not be so conspicuous of course were it not for Smith's special claim for criticism that it is historical. Just at the place where he maintained that the Medieval approach allegorises, he seemed to spiritualise.

Smith apparently anticipated that he might be queried along this line and so distinguished between the prophet using symbol and allegory (which, therefore, would have to be interpreted in an allegorical way) and the prophet speaking in a "spiritual sense" (which speaking must be interpreted accordingly). The allegorical principle holds that "the obscurity of form is intentional, at least on the part of the revealing Spirit, and so that the true meaning of each prophecy is the maximum of New Testament truth that can be taken out of it by any use of allegory which the Christian reader can devise."[285] The spiritual-sense principle holds that "the early thinker has apprehended only germs of universal truth, that he expresses these as clearly as he can, and that the figurative or imperfect form of his utterance corresponds to a real limitation of vision."[286] Certainly Smith is denying that the prophet spoke according to the principle which he has described as allegorical; it appears - although his language is not absolutely clear on this - that he is asserting

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[285] The Prophets of Israel (1882), pp.339-340.

[286] Ibid., p.339.

that the prophet spoke in the sense which he has described as spiritual.[287] In any case Smith tends, as regards the prophets, to look at their history in order to see through it or beyond it, and so seems not to take it as seriously or in the same sense as the prophet himself did.

It can hardly be said often enough that the problem of bringing the Old and New dispensations together is an enormous one, as is the problem (is it the same problem?) of interpreting the prophets. Smith's solution to it is a useful and often a persuasively argued one. Certainly he has signalled a clear warning against the dangers of literalistic interpretations and given equally clear directions about how to avoid them. Indeed it was Smith's contention that it was the great service of the critical study of prophecy to the Church that it had shown that the primary importance of the prophetic writings lay not in the prediction of future history but in the statement of broad religious principles. Criticism's contribution was not merely negative, a simple refusal to believe in the possibility of predicting future events, but positive, a stress on the supremacy of the knowledge of God and His will against the mere knowledge of a few coming events.[288] Whether or not he has has allowed quite enough importance to the role of the actual predictions of the prophets, either in their

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[287] The difficulty in understanding exactly what Smith is saying arises on p.340. After plainly repudiating the idea that the prophets were speaking allegorically (by contrasting the allegorical with the spiritual sense), Smith then went on to say that we "do not need to carry with us to the study of the prophet any formulated principles of prophetic interpretation", if we consent to understand his teaching "by the plain rules of ordinary human speech, and in connection with the life of his own age." The question is, do the "formulated principles of prophetic interpretation", which we do not need, include the spiritual sense which Smith seems to be allowing for?

[288] Lectures and Essays, p.176.

failure to be fulfilled or the possibility of their somehow yet being fulfilled, is another question.

Smith never denied that the prophets' visions would someday be actually fulfilled. In perfect consistency with orthodox teaching he affirmed that the New Testament as well as the Old taught that Christ would establish a visible kingdom in the New Earth, and that we like the prophets are saved by hope. What he denied was that the coming glory of God on Zion would be modelled on anything that was part of the prophets' own circumstances. The future theocracy, he argued, would be a totally new thing, guaranteed by the resurrection of our Lord in a glorified body, "the pledge of the physical regeneration which Paul calls the liberation of the creature, the 'redemption of our bodies', and the actual constitution of that indissoluable bond between heaven and earth, which ensures to the glorified theocracy the unending bodily presence of its King."[289]

Smith's argument is interesting and helpful. The weakness in his position - his apparent failure to take the actual predictions of the prophets with the same seriousness as the prophets themselves must have surely done - is a weakness only because Smith's whole critical procedure is an attempt precisely to appreciate the prophets' message in terms of the circumstances and language in which it was originally delivered. Those who expect yet a literal fulfilment of prophetic prediction on the one hand or those who attempt to explain it all in terms of the psychological make-up of the prophet himself

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[289] Ibid., pp.283-284. These remarks come in an interesting section which follows immediately on and is part of "The Fulfilment of Prophecy." It is entitled "Application of Preceding Statement to Newman's Theory of Prophecy, Church and Kingdom of God, etc." and is a refutation of J. H. Newman's view that prophecy has been literally fulfilled in the visible church, which Newman apparently regarded as the theocracy of the prophets' vision.

on the other, have, it would seem, a more consistent case, though not necessarily, of course, a more satisfactory one.

One final comment. It may be of some significance that Smith never gave any extended treatment to Isaiah 7, 9 or 11, texts to which some attention must be paid in any fair appreciation of the relationship between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament religion. In fact in the place where he specifically addressed the question of Isaiah 7.14ff. and its use by New Testament writers, Smith was content to note that they do not always confine themselves to the original references of the words they quote, that for them all Old Testament Scripture pointed to Christ and that therefore they "do not help us to understand what a text of Isaiah meant to the prophet himself, or to those whom he personally addressed." And the understanding of the prophets' original meaning, was, as Smith saw it, his only concern as a historical student of prophecy.[290] Similar treatment is given to Messianic prophecy in general in Isaiah.[291] A discussion of the altogether important connection between the Old and New Testaments, in regard to specific texts anyway, was apparently thought to be precluded by a genuinely historical approach to Scripture.

This long and fatiguing discussion not only of Smith's view of the Bible but of his understanding of the relationship between the two Testaments, supplemented by a review of his handling of prophecy, has been an attempt to examine from as many sides as possible how Smith worked out his believing criticism. Inasmuch as he contended that his faith was strictly orthodox and evangelical but also recognised that his approach to the Old Testament was not traditional, it seemed proper to at least touch on those issues wherein old faith and new criticism might be most expected to meet.

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[290] The Prophets of Israel (1882), pp.271-272.

[291] Ibid., pp.305-306; cf. Note, pp.430-431.

There remain two other such issues, one specific and one general. The specific issue is that of the doctrine of the Atonement, important not merely because it stands so near the centre of all that is distinctive in biblical Christianity and therefore provides a means of access (if we can look at the manner in which he handles it) to the character of a man's faith, but also because the way in which he views it indicates a good deal about his understanding of, again, the relationship of Christ to the Old Dispensation. The general issue is that of theology, important in Smith's case, first because he himself had not a little to say on the subject, especially in his early years, and second because it seems that some kind of theological link is precisely what is needed to hold together his faith and his criticism.

Sacrifice And The Death Of Christ

It must surely be one of the darker mysteries of the life and thought of William Robertson Smith that he whose knowledge of the Old Testament was almost limitless, whose insights into the problem of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments were profound, and whose greatest single work dealt with sacrifice in ancient religion, should have said next to nothing about the sacrifice of Christ. The subject fairly cries out for comment. It is never directly addressed. A very great deal is said about redemption and the absolute necessity for theology to be done by redeemed men in the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit; but as for the Atonement, its nature and its means - the doctrine of it - it is, to put it mildly, conspicuous by its absence.[292] Smith's biographers point out that Mr. McEwan, minister

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[292] An almost perfect example of this is found in Smith's essay "Christianity and the Supernatural", Lectures and Essays, pp.121ff., where the words redemption ("the work of redemption"), regeneration, and atonement are used repeatedly and emphatically but without distinction or discussion.

of John Knox's Free Church, Canongate, Edinburgh, was almost alone in noticing that Smith's general theory of sacrifice (as set forth in The Old Testament in the Jewish Church) "involved a new theory of the essential character of Old Testament Religion" which, in McEwan's judgement, "cut away the basis on which the whole doctrine of salvation rests." And in what amounts to an extravagance of understatement, they concluded that "the point raised by Mr. McEwan was entitled to more serious consideration than most of those debated during the five years of the controversy."[293] But whether or not McEwan's judgement regarding Smith's views of sacrifice in general is correct is not quite the issue here. It is that the special topic of the sacrifice of Christ, not only because of its own intrinsic significance, but in its obvious relation to the host of issues which Smith's field of study necessarily raises and which Smith himself raised, wants much more attention than he ever gave it.

Besides "Bible" Smith wrote a spate of articles on biblical and other subjects for the Britannica, amongst them "Epistle to the Hebrews" and "Sacrifice." In either or both of these one might naturally expect something on the death of Christ. One finds virtually nothing. "Hebrews" (1880) deals almost exclusively with questions of authorship and "Sacrifice" (1886) is pretty much a sketch of the argument developed fully in Semites three years later, namely that even in early Israel a sacrifice was primarily a meal offered to the deity.[294]

It was Smith's contention in Semites that "the origin and meaning of sacrifice constitute the central problem of ancient religion."[295] But

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[293] Life, pp.417ff.

[294] Encyclopaedia Britannica, ninth edition, vol. XXI, p.133.

[295] The Religion of the Semites, third edition (1927), p.27.

even the highest forms of sacrificial worship, he acknowledged in the Britannica article, "present much that is repulsive to modern ideas, and in particular it requires an effort to reconcile our imagination to the bloody ritual which is prominent in almost every religion which has a strong sense of sin."[296] Nonetheless he reminded his readers that from the beginning sacrifice has expressed certain ideas which lie at the very root of true religion: "the fellowship of the worshippers with one another in their fellowship with the deity, and the consecration of the bonds of kinship as the type of all right ethical relation between man and man."[297] The piacular sacrifices, Smith said, "though these were particularly liable to distortions disgraceful to man and dishonouring to the godhead", also contained the germs of eternal truth, not only the idea of divine justice but also that of divine and human pity. And in what looks for all the world like the promise of a discussion of the Christian doctrine, he concluded: "The dreadful sacrifice is performed not with savage joy but with awful sorrow, and in the mystic sacrifices the deity himself suffers with and for the sins of his people and lives again in their new life."[298] In fact the very next section in the article is entitled "The Idea of Sacrifice in the Christian Church." Disappointingly, however, it deals only with the practice or alleged practice, of sacrifice (in the Roman mass) in the Church and contains nothing on the relationship of Christ's death to Old Testament ideas. There is no mention of Christian doctrine. Moreover - and this is perhaps one of the more interesting features of the article - this particular section

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[296] Encyclopaedia Britannica, ninth edition, vol. XXI, p.138.

[297] Ibid.

[298] Ibid.

of it was not written by Smith.[299]

Perhaps the closest we ever get to a traditional statement on the subject is in the first edition of The Old Testament in the Jewish Church. The Levitical legislation, Smith argued, post-exilic and connected with the Second Temple, and tending to be impersonal and unspiritual though it did, nonetheless prepared the way for the New Covenant in Christ. In the old ritual, sacrifice and offering were essentially an expression of homage and the element of atonement held a very subsidiary place. But as the sacrifices became divorced from individual life the idea of sacrificial homage lost much of its force and became "a sort of abstract representative worship." It was in Ezekiel, and more in the Levitical legislation, that the element of atonement took a foremost place. The sense of sin had grown deeper under the teaching of the prophets and "amidst the proofs of Jehovah's anger that darkened the last days of the Jewish state." Sin and forgiveness were thus the main themes of prophetic discourse and the problem of acceptance with God "exercised every thoughtful mind[a]," "not only from the Psalms and the prophets of the Exile and Restoration", but above all from the book of Job, which is certainly later than the time of Jeremiah." Even though the acceptance of the worship of the sanctuary had always been regarded as the visible sacrament of Jehovah's acceptance of the worshipper, now, more than at any time before, the "first point in acceptance" was felt to be the forgiveness of sin and "the weightiest element" in the ritual was that which symbolised the atonement or wiping out of iniquity.[300]

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[299] Rather by Edwin Hatch, University Reader in Ecclesiastical History at Oxford.

[300] The Old Testament in the Jewish Church (1881), pp.381-382.

In this brief survey Smith described how the concept of atonement emerged from a place of secondary to one of primary importance. In ancient Israel, as indeed in all ancient religion, ritual sacrifice was seen as a meal offered to God. Gradually that notion lost force until at last, under the preaching of the prophets and the pressure of events, the question of how God's favour could be restored pushed the idea of atonement for sin into the foreground. By the seventh century the association of sacrifice with forgiveness had superseded the earlier association of sacrifice with homage.

Whether or not Smith considered this adjustment in and of itself a good thing, he did not say; nor does he comment, here, on the details of the symbolism. The important thing in his view is that it prepared the way for the Christian doctrine. "It is enough to indicate in one word that the ritual of atoning sacrifice was so shaped by Divine wisdom that it supplied to the New Testament a basis intelligible to the Hebrew believers for the explanation of the atoning work of Christ." Smith clearly recognised a link, forged indeed by divine foreknowledge, between what he considered a relatively late conception of sacrifice and that by which the New Testament writers explained the death of Christ. And then in what would seem to be a kind of précis of his own belief, he declared:

> Not indeed that the blood of bulls and goats ever took away sin. The true basis of forgiveness, in the Old Testament as in the New, lies, not in man's offering, but in a work of sovereign love. It is Jehovah, for His own name's sake, who blots out Israel's transgressions and will not remember his sin. But the atoning ritual ever held before the people's eyes the mysterious connection of forgiving love with awful justice, and pointed by its very inadequacy to the need for a better atonement of Jehovah's own providing.[301]

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[301] Ibid., p.382.

Even though the Levitical understanding of sacrifice was not, according to Smith, the original understanding, in fact was a misunderstanding, it nonetheless formed the basis for the Christian interpretation of the sacrifice of Christ. Again Smith has attempted to put together the latest results of biblical scholarship and the tenents of orthodox theology.

But edifying though his statement certainly is, it probably is not as extensive as the theologically more inquisitive or more demanding might require. Horatius Bonar, for instance, referred to Smith's "ominous silence" on the matter.[302] Moreover, in the 1892 revision of The Old Testament in the Jewish Church the character of this section is completely altered and the edifying portion left out. In the first edition the paragraph begins, "With all this there went another change not less important in the way of preparation for the work of our Lord"; in the second edition it begins simply, "With all this there went another change not less important."[303] The piece which deals with the divine wisdom shaping the ritual of sacrifice so as to make intelligible the atoning work of Christ is replaced by a discussion of the similarity between the atoning ordinances of the Levitical law and the expiatory rites of other nations, with the conclusion;

> As regards their meaning the law is generally silent, and it was left to the worshipper to interpret the symbolism as he could . . . . They were conventions to which God had attached the promise of forgiveness; and their real significance as a factor in the religious life of Judaism lay not in the details of the ritual but in that they constantly impressed on the people the sense of abiding sin, the need of forgiveness, and above all the assurance that the religion of Israel was

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[302] Life, p.418.

[303] The Old Testament in the Jewish Church, second edition (1892), p.379.

> grounded on a promise to those who sought God in the way that He prescribed.[304]

There is nothing here about Christ. We are no nearer a statement of Smith's view of the death of Christ in the second edition than in the first. If anything we are farther away. In the first there is the outline at least, clear enough though only sketched, of what amounts to a fairly traditional expiatory, perhaps even propitiatory ("awful justice") doctrine of the atonement. In the second the discussion does not move beyond a brief attempt to explain the laws governing sacrifice which were given to the nation Israel. The change may be thought to give some substance to the view that "the second edition of the OTJC, 1892, ... has to be read from the perspective of questioning whether Smith's theological assertions are to be taken as seriously as when they were written in 1881", with its corollary that "the movement into higher criticism still can flow out of faith, but the theological articulation of this faith, effected before 1881, has undergone a substantial reduction."[305] On the other hand they may be taken simply as alterations Smith thought proper to a book going out now to a different audience from that to which he had delivered the lectures eleven years earlier.[306] In any case, even if Smith's theology had changed significantly between 1881

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[304] Ibid., pp.380-381.

[305] Warner McReynolds Bailey, "Theology and Criticism in William Robertson Smith", an unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 1970, pp.294-295.

[306] In fact that is exactly what he said in a letter to Messrs. Black, his publishers, dated 14 November, 1891, concerning the revision of OTJC. What he cut out he did because it seemed to be superfluous, "as bearing rather on the temporary occasion of the lectures than on the subject itself." C.10, The W. Robertson Smith Collection, The Cambridge University Library.

and 1882 (as Bailey argues), or between the two editions of The Old Testament in the Jewish Church, the absence in the second of what appears to be the more traditional handling of sacrifice would not by itself prove too much.[307] Nor would its presence in the first. Indeed the point is precisely and only that either way, Smith, Old Testament scholar and student of comparative religion, has given us so little on a matter which, considering his theological environment as well as his professional interests, would seem to call for much more. The fact that more was not demanded of him on this issue perhaps only serves to underline the as yet unrealised depth, complication, and subtlety of the biblical criticism case which had centered on the single question of whether or not Moses actually wrote Deuteronomy.

The Religion of the Semites was Smith's last book. It came late enough in his career and long enough after his departure from Scotland to have been, perhaps, by so much, of relatively little vital significance for the "Smith case." The same, it is true, could be said of "Sacrifice." But more important, Semites is an altogether different kind of book from any he had written previously. It made no pretensions to being theological; it had hardly any "theological tinge", as T. K. Cheyne regretted The Old Testament in the Jewish Church did.[308] It was a study in the then only emergent discipline of anthropology or comparative religion and in it, as has recently been said, Smith was

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[307] Moreover, any judgement would have to take into account Smith's important footnote to the passage (Note 5, p.438 of the first edition) as well as his note on p.381 of the revised edition. It should also be said that Bailey does not cite this particular passage in support of his case.

[308] In a review in the Academy of 7th May 1881, Life, p.419.

no longer a mediator of new methods, but a pioneer.[309] Still, the book was not completely unrelated to his earlier work and there are comments here and there in it, not to mention its central argument, which tend to support the conclusion that Smith's views of Christ's death, or apparent lack thereof, had significant implications for his theology overall and might well have provoked a much louder protest than they did.

The thesis of Semites, the development of which constitutes nearly half the book, is essentially that already set out in "Sacrifice": "the fundamental idea of sacrifice, is not that of a sacred tribute, but of communion between the God and his worshippers by joint participation in the living flesh and blood of a sacred victim."[310] Rituals of atoning sacrifice were a later development, a "gradual degradation of ordinary sacrifice" in fact,[311] preceded by "a different and profounder" notion of atonement and conceived in "the distress and terror produced by the political convulsions of the seventh century."[312]

Smith freely acknowledged "how large a part of the teaching of the New Testament and of all Christian theology turns on the ideas of sacrifice and priesthood", but contended that in what they had to say on these subjects, the New Testament writers presuppose, as the basis of their argument, the notions current among the Jews and embodied in the ordinances of the Temple.[313] But the ritual of the Temple, though

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[309] G. W. Anderson, "Two Scottish Semitists" (Presidential Address to the Eighth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament), Congress Volume, 1974 (Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, Vol. XXVIII), p. xiv.

[310] The Religion of the Semites, third edition (1927), p.345.

[311] Ibid., p.354.

[312] Ibid., pp.348ff.

[313] Ibid., p.3.

relatively late in evolving, was not entirely novel: the Pentateuch did not create a priesthood and a sacrificial system on an altogether independent basis, but only reshaped and remodeled, "in accordance with a more spiritual doctrine", institutions which were not only of an older Hebrew type, but ones which the Hebrews had in common with their heathen neighbours.[314]

> Thus, when we wish thoroughly to study the New Testament doctrine of sacrifice, we are carried back step by step till we reach a point where we have to ask what sacrifice meant, not to the old Hebrews alone, but to the whole circle of nations of which they formed a part. By considerations of this sort we are led to the conclusion that no one of the religions of Semitic origin which still exercise so great an influence on the lives of men can be completely understood without inquiry into the older traditional religion of the Semitic race.[315]

Very broadly speaking Smith's method is simply that of studying thoroughly and carefully the background of any subject for the fullest understanding of it. But as applied here it has, quite obviously, serious consequences. Inasmuch as the New Testament writers based their interpretation of the death of Christ on concepts of sacrifice which even by their time were degradations of the original conception, and inasmuch as the fact that they were degradations is a discovery of the modern study of ancient religion, are we now to read what they said in the light of the latest anthropological research? In other words did they understand less of the real, the primordial and profounder, significance of sacrifice than we do, because they did not have access to facts and techniques to which we have access? This would seem to be Smith's argument.

It is certainly possible to argue that the historical fact of the difference between the original and, say, the Pauline conception of

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[314] Ibid.

[315] Ibid.; also pp.1-2.

sacrifice does not invalidate the essential truth or religious significance of the New Testament interpretation of Christ's death, or that the Christian doctrine of atonement must be seen in the wider context of a divinely ordered history or development of religious ideas.[316] Nevertheless it is not difficult to appreciate the effects, to put it no stronger, of being told that the "fundamental idea" of sacrifice was different from the idea of sacrifice entertained by the writers of the New Testament, to say nothing of the writers of the Old.[317] And here too is the problem of the inspiration of Scripture. What could be meant by an assertion that the Scriptures were inspired if it is not meant that the authors of Scripture, and in this case, the authors of Christian doctrine, understood the death of Christ in the most profound way possible, i.e., according to the original or fundamental conceptions of sacrifice? As Mr. McEwan, but strangely hardly anyone else, recognised, Smith's handling of this particular subject had far-reaching and important ramifications. The question is whether or not Smith fully appreciated their range and depth. Is his "ominous silence" the evidence that he did or that he did not? Or merely the evidence that for reasons as yet unexplained, Christian doctrines of the Atonement were no part of his primary concerns?

Theology

Smith was no mean theologian. Considering that theology was not

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[316] As Stanley Cook argues in his notes to the third edition of The Religion of the Semites, p.654.

[317] Smith's argument with regard to the wide variety of interpretations of Christ's death since apostolic times (Ibid., p.424) would not seem to affect the argument regarding the interpretation of the New Testament writers themselves. But see also p.439 where Smith declares that the attempts of "Christian theologians" to give precise meanings to the terms redemption, substitution, purification, atoning blood and the garment of righteousness are "altogether illegimate" - although this was probably not meant to include the "theologians" of the New Testament either. N.B. SEE NOTE APPENDED TO FOOTNOTE 12, P. 261.

his main work he was in fact an extremely knowledgeable one. But because of his heavy stress on the non-dogmatic nature of true religion and his insistence on a thoroughly historical as opposed to a dogmatic approach to the Bible, it would be amiss not to look, first, at the connections in his thinking between faith and history and theology, and second, at his views of theology itself.

Smith once told his students that even though in his lectures on the prophets their first concern would be to understand prophecy as a factor in the Old Testament history, they must not forget that the interest which must dominate all their studies was not historical but theological.[318] What he meant was that prophecy, or any other aspect of Old Testament history, must not be regarded as mere religious history. The Old Testament was for him a living book, to be interpreted and applied to our own needs and time. On the other hand he was not to be associated with those who subordinated historical considerations to merely homiletical ones, as if all that mattered was the prophets' word to us, regardless of its original application.[319] Even less did he sympathise with those who attempted to guard the Bible's message by passing over its sometimes vexatious facts in fidelity to a certain dogmatic construction. The fullest understanding of the Bible's personal word, Smith thought, was obtained by recognising that "the supreme truths of religion were first promulgated and first became a living power in forms that are far simpler than the simplest system of modern dogma."[320] In saying so however he was only reiterating what he had always said regarding the interpretation of Scripture. Nor was

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[318] Lectures and Essays, p.342.

[319] Ibid., p.344.

[320] The Prophets of Israel (1882), p. x.

he rejecting the theological enterprise, only warning against its excesses. In other words, committed though he was to a historical approach to Scripture, he fully recognised the necessity of theology, but more, the necessity of rightly conceiving it.

a. Theology And Faith

As could have been anticipated, Smith made it quite clear that personal religion and theology were two different things. His ubiquitous and strident comments on the un-dogmatic nature of real religion would be enough to forbid anyone thinking that he ever regarded knowledge about God the same as knowledge of God or that any man was ever saved by doctrinal soundness. At the same time he insisted on the absolute necessity of precisely-formulated Christian knowledge systematically taught. It was, he said, the "only one strong practical barrier" to the delusion that "personal earnestness, some natural eloquence, and a fair measure of familiarity with the easier parts of the Bible, and perhaps with the Shorter Catechism" are all that are required to fit a man to teach in the Church.[321] But even in the case of the ordinary laymen, Protestant belief declares that no spiritual growth is possible apart from a definite understanding of God's will and purpose; and that means Christian knowledge. That does not mean that however inarticulate a believer's knowledge is, it is in all cases, in some perhaps mysterious and very personal way, clearly formulated. There is an important difference between practical insight and theology. Nor does it mean that when that knowledge is expressed, it is somehow still theology even if it lacks logical arrangement and systematic structure: the word theology must not be used to cover simple religious

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[321] Lectures and Essays, p.316.

knowledge, loose and un-formed. For Smith then faith did not consist of theology, nonetheless theology was essential.

As he did in other matters, Smith was steering a middle and reasonable course. He was attempting to hold in one hand both the primary importance of an understanding of God's will in Christ which is simple and spiritual and the requirement for a theological knowledge which is clear, precise and systematic. He was attempting to answer the question, "If the essential quality of real Christian knowledge is personal and practical, what is the use of theology at all?"[322] He did this by distinguishing individual Christianity from that which is social. So long as Christianity is considered primarily a matter of personal experience, a carefully worked out theology is not necessary. But no church, he maintained, can be built on a base of mutual or shared religious experiences. A society that is built on such a base "is not the Church, but the conventicle, the ecclesiola in ecclesia, the fellowship of separatists and sectarians."[323] Dogmatic assertions, Smith declared, just because they tend to divide Christians, cannot simply be abolished while love secures Christian unity - because the Church is not the fellowship of Christian love, which requires no unity of organisation, but the fellowship of Christian worship, and "the common worship of many individuals must be the expression in intelligible form of their common relation of faith towards God."[324] Faith must be articulated, but if its articulation expresses only personal experience, only the like-minded are edified; if it expresses nothing definite, no one is edified.

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[322] Ibid., pp.324-325.

[323] Ibid., p.326.

[324] Ibid., p.329.

> But the extremes of sectarianism and the Broad Church may both be avoided if we observe that there is such a thing as a normal Christian faith, which is in fact, the faith of the Church made perfect, and which has the power to draw all believers to it; that whenever this normal faith is intellectually apprehended in all its bearings, and practically applied to the administration of every function of the Church, the Church has attained to catholicity, and that on this external unity cannot fail to follow.[325]

Smith's view of the nature and purpose of theology is related to, if not determined by, his view of the nature of Christian belief on the one hand and the nature of the Church on the other. While belief is always personal and not, at its practical centre, merely dogmatic, it is still never divorced from knowledge. At the same time, Christian knowledge, unframed or inarticulate, is not theology. The Church, if it is truly the Church, is not simply a collection of redeemed individuals whose mutuality is nothing more than a shared personal experience. The Church, Smith said, is a divine ordinance, in which men of all possible types of religion come together on the broad ground of faith in Christ and obedience to Him and unite in such activities as shall give fit expression to their unity and conduce to common edification.[326] This requires clearly formulated knowledge. It also requires organisation. Thus the progress of the Church depends upon two things, a vigorous theology and a wise administration, the first to continually bring into clearer light all sides of Christian truth in a comprehensive system in relation to the present attainments of the Church, and the second to insure that every gain in insight is duly applied to government, discipline and worship.[327]

Theology, in Smith's view, is that which keeps the Church, as it were, the Church. It keeps individual believers from falling back in

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[325] Ibid., pp.330-331.

[326] Ibid., p.327.

[327] Ibid., pp.331-332.

on themselves and their limited experience by directing them to the more multi-faceted character of Christian truth. At the same time, however, he held that "public worship is not a theological exercise *in which men meet on the basis of common scientific knowledge; it is* an exercise of common faith, in which the gospel message is personally set forth and received with personal affection and obedience."[328] Thus no theology is required for any man to join in the worship of the Church. But it is required nonetheless.

> Theology is the affair of him who conducts that worship, the system of knowledge by which he is enabled to lead the service, not as a man calling on the like-minded to sympathise with his own personal experience, but as one who, out of an all-sided grasp of the fulness of the gospel, can bring forth words of promise and admonition, words of thanksgiving and prayer suited to every Christian need, and yet free from all individualism.[329]

In fact it is just this view of the job of the minister and the minister's need for theological knowledge that justifies the Church's placing a young man in the pastorate: he is valued, not for his piety or for his experience, but precisely for his training, for "his acquaintance with large views of truth, large principles of administration, deduced from the careful study of the Bible and the history of the Church."[330] So it is that sermons must be biblically grounded and theologically formed.

> It is the Bible which is the true manual of Catholic religious life; and the Bible, not interpreted by that personal experience which only culls stray flowers from its pages, but set forth through diligent study in the many-sided fulness by which it supplies the Church's every need.[331]

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[328] Ibid., p.333.

[329] Ibid.

[330] Ibid., p.337.

[331] Ibid., pp.335-336.

And from the pen of one whose whole concern from one point of view was to define faith as quintessentially personal and un-dogmatic comes this solid piece of advice: "Personal piety is no call to the ministry, unless it is also a call to full and zealous preparation for the ministry."[332]

So far Smith has perhaps not said too much more than what must be said; somehow theology is both required and not required. A man's relation to Christ does not consist in his theology, yet the Church cannot do without a theology. What must be looked at therefore is the relation in Smith's thinking between personal experience and knowledge. Granted that the Church cannot progress apart from a clear and systematic formulation of the truths which unite it, how are those truths, in the heart and mind of the Christian theologian arrived at? One would expect from those who viewed faith as essentially dogmatic or propositional that the answer might be that a proper apprehension of doctrinal truth initiates as well as sustains faith, that right doctrine precedes or is in some sense inextricably bound up with saving belief, and that faith grows as knowledge grows. One would expect the opposite from Smith, namely that experience initiates and informs knowledge and that knowledge grows as faith grows. Something very like that is Smith's answer.

In "The Work of a Theological Society", the paper which his biographers refer to as "in some of its aspects, revolutionary",[333] Smith argued that the way theology works may be seen in the development of John's Christology.

> We know from the Gospel history, especially from that Gospel which is the direct record of an apostle's experience, that the bond which knit the faithful disciples to their

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[332] Ibid., p.337.

[333] Life, p.118.

> Master was not in the first instance a distinct conception of the Godhead imminent in Him. The surrender of their whole heart to Christ was the condition, not the fruit, of a correct Christology. Even the Resurrection left much that was vague in the Apostles' theology, and perhaps the full development of the Christology of John was only attained towards the end of a long life of devoted service to a risen Saviour . . . . The first effect of contact with Christ was the production of faith and love, and then it required only the continual presence of the same contact with the Saviour to develop a true knowledge of Him with whom the life of the apostle was now inseparably bound up. And so the historical Christ was ever the foundation and rule of John's Christology, though only the inner life of union with Christ supplied the power to pierce the phenomena and know what this wondrous person really is.[334]

The same, said Smith, is true for every Christian: our identity with Christ is what develops our knowledge of Him.

> Only by a gradual growth, by constant experimental intercourse with the historical person of Christ, i.e. by comparing every point in the gospel history with our own personal necessities, does our faith deepen into knowledge.[335]

This empirical datum acted on by "an exercise of real hard thought" and worked into a scientific shape, is what constitutes our theology.[336]

What this implies for our actual practice of theology is that the Scriptures, which are our access to the historical Christ, are not the "sole instrument" of theology. "Much rather the instrument of our theology is the whole compass of the regenerated mental powers."[337] But the Scriptures are still "the sole foundation and rule of theology", because in the Scriptures only do we find the object of faith laid down in an authoritative form", i.e. as it presented itself historically and was apprehended by men enlightened by God's Spirit to grasp it truly."[338] What Scripture provides is not only the means of entering

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[334] Ibid., pp.158-159.

[335] Ibid., p.160.

[336] Ibid.

[337] Ibid.

[338] Ibid.

into a living experience of Christ, but also a kind of "exegetical check" on both our theology and our experience.

> If our intelligible Christ differs from the Christ of history, if the salvation we receive differs from the salvation which Christ bestowed on those who were eye-witnesses of His saving work, then we may be sure either that we have argued falsely from our faith, or that our faith itself is false, having its source within ourselves and not in a true operation of God which can never be out of harmony with His working in days gone by.[339]

Our theology, the formulations of our knowledge of Christ which are essential to the growth of the Church into catholic unity, is then the result of first, entering by way of the Scriptures into a personal union with the historical Christ, and second, working out that experience into intelligible forms by constant reference back to the inspired record of those who knew Him in the first instance. The difference, it appears, between the theologian and the ordinary believer is that the theologian has had access to past attempts to work out these formulations and so can set his own in the wider horizon of the history of the Church through the ages.

Smith suggested that three things would make our theological work "harmonious and profitable": (1) that we take Christ as the alpha and omega of our theology, the historical Christ of the gospel as its foundation and the Christ coming again as its goal; (2) that we seek to think and reason, not in our own strength, but by the Holy Spirit strengthening us to see Christ as He is; (3) that we avail ourselves of our position as inheritors of the theological fund which the Church has already gained, not yielding our freedom to man's judgement, yet not forgetting that we are parts of a great whole, and that true advance is possible only by diligently developing those results which God's

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[339] Ibid.

providence has already given to the Church.[340]

These suggestions, for one thing, provide further reinforcement for the claim made earlier that the historical Christ manifested in the gospel is the foundation of all that Smith did. Everything depends upon the centrality of a "complete" and "completely orthodox" Christ with whom we have a living and supernatural relationship - which, as we have said, may have made an aggressively surgical approach to the New Testament, for Smith, less than comfortable. They underline, for another thing, Smith's deference to the Holy Spirit, indication again that he had no rationalist predilections. Indeed his language here, taking into account some important differences in its application, is that of William Cunningham.[341] Apparent too is Smith's firm belief in theological progress. Not only did he stress the necessity of continually referring back to the Scriptures, he stressed the necessity of continually referring back to the whole past history of the Church as well; moreover to her present and future history. For to take seriously the Church's theological history past is necessarily, in some sense, to take seriously her history present and future.

b. The Progress Of Theology

Smith spoke of the need for the Church's theology to advance, in order, simply, for it to do its work in the world. If the Church does not recognise a need for its thinking to grow it probably does not recognise a need for its thinking to meet current problems. When theology is thought of as static, with nothing more to be learned, then even that which is static is not properly and thoroughly pursued and "pastoral efficiency is correspondingly impaired."[342]

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[340] Ibid., p.162.

[341] Cf. Cunningham's Lectures, p.559.

[342] Lectures and Essays, pp.315-316.

In its negative aspect this conviction that theology must advance was probably a reaction to a theology which saw its main function as apologetic. Note has already been taken of Smith's view that a predominantly apologetic theology was evidence of the lifelessness of the Church that practised it. His point here is related: in taking up a defensive posture, theology indicates that it sees its present system as already perfect, and this, further, is evidence of a failure to recognise what Smith called "the historical personality of the Church." The reason the Church had not advanced in catholicity was due partly, Smith argued, to the fact that "a sound doctrinal and historical appreciation of the present theology of the Church in its relation to present needs is not diffused throughout the ministry, or even among leaders in our ecclesiastical courts", and partly to the fact that "theology has not yet spoken any decisive and convincing word on the questions of the day; . . ." During two hundred years of Church life, Smith declared, there has been "hardly any marked advance in the Church's systematic knowledge."[343] The theological consciousness of the Church needs not only to be awakened, he proclaimed, but to be guided forward to higher conceptions of the truth. "The doctrine of theological finality can never be accepted, save in a Church very ignorant of her own principles, or very indifferent to their practical application."[344]

The key, probably, to all of Smith's thinking about theology, and indeed to his own theological system, is this notion that theology is an on-going enterprise. He did not believe that there was really any such thing as a new theology; in fact no theology which is developing

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[343] Ibid., p.339.

[344] Ibid., pp.339-340.

can, in the nature of the case, be new, because of necessity it is related to all that has preceded it. He did believe, however, that what was needed was a continual re-thinking of that which has been handed on to us. Even though it can never be of our own construction and is always ready-made, it must be re-made, as it were, to our own specifications. "The thing has still to be thought out by every man for himself, though not thought out without guidance from those who have gone before."[345] This, from Smith's point of view, is but another illustration of the way the Church functions organically. The theology of any single individual can only be "a one-sided imperfect development of that common faith which binds the whole Church to Christ"; but all the various imperfect developments supplement one another, and because the individual is united not only to Christ but to fellow believers, there arises in each age a unity in the theology of the whole Church which naturally gives way to further developments in the generation that follows.[346] Thus the individual believer, on the basis of his own experience of the historical Christ revealed in sacred Scripture, works out, as he must do, intelligible formulations of his faith, a faith not dogmatic in the first instance, but necessarily if only loosely theological in the second. These formulations, taken together in the fellowship of the body of Christ and systematically developed against the background of those already developed, constitute the Church's theology, never static, always in touch with present needs and moving toward "a relation between Christ and the Church made perfect."[347]

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[345] Ibid., p.161.

[346] Ibid.

[347] Ibid., pp.161-162.

c. Smith's Theology Vs. The Older Theology

What is immediately apparent here, in spite of its superficially traditional dress, is the considerable difference in tone or spirit between Smith's construction and that of those he quite consciously opposed. In fact the word construction is central to the difference. In an important sense, Smith did not really see theology as a construction at all, unless it was a very temporary one. He saw it as a much more fluid thing, continuously being modified. In this he was very much at odds with those of the dogmatic school. Theology was not for Smith, as it was for them, the basis on which the Church worked, as if it were a kind of eternal given. It was, rather, something which was always developing, always rooted in that which preceded it to be sure, but always somehow fresh, formed and growing out of the life of the Church. "Even Scripture contains not only Christian experience", Smith said, "but in some measure developed theology."[348] That is why the Scriptures, in Smith's view, cannot be the "sole instrument" of our theology: the instrument is "the whole compass of the regenerated mental powers"; the Scriptures are the "foundation and rule." By that Smith must have meant that we do not do theology by means of the Scriptures, as if the words and ideas of the Bible were the only words and ideas ever given, or ever to be given, by God. No, the Scriptures are the place from which we begin and to which we return again and again, but in that they do not stifle human thought or eliminate the need for it.[349]

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[348] Ibid., p.161.

[349] It is recognised that one of the things involved in this discussion is the distinction between, and the precise relation of, biblical theology and dogmatic or systematic or church theology, or the exact meaning of any one of those designations. Smith himself does not explicitly make the distinction and some of the older writers imply that there is none (e.g. Cunningham, Lectures, pp.7ff., especially perhaps p.16.). There may be a sense in which these very distinctions are at the centre of the conflict between old and new.

All this is of a piece with Smith's critical procedure. Since Scripture was not the instrument of theology, it was itself in some sense subject to the regenerated mental powers which were. In other words a theological system - in the sense of a particular conception of the way Scripture must work together or be interpreted - must not govern the way we examine it. Speaking once of the origin of the Pentateuch he argued that the question ought to be prosecuted by the ordinary rules of historical inquiry, "and only when a result has been reached should we pause to consider the theological bearings of what we have learned."[350] Central as theology was in Smith's thinking he acknowledged and disavowed what he called "theological prejudices." It was important therefore, in order to avoid them, sometimes to see Scripture in a strictly historical way, even through the eyes of those who approach it from "an altogether different point of view." And then, in what is surely one of his most quotable and insightful passages, Smith fairly spelled out the governing principle of the believing critic. "It is easier to correct the errors of a rationalism with which we have no sympathy, than to lay aside prejudices deeply interwoven with our most cherished and truest convictions."[351] The principle is that research precedes dogma, not the other way around.

d. Smith As Non-theologian

One final comment. There can be little doubt that Smith was a theologian, not only because he fully accepted and persuasively articulated the need for a comprehensive and scientifically formulated system of Christian truth based on the Scripture and rooted in the historic

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[350] The Old Testament in the Jewish Church (1881), p.312.

[351] Ibid.

tradition of the Church universal, but because he practised theology himself. His thinking is held together by well worked-out connections between its major elements which are themselves major doctrines - faith, the Church, revelation, inspiration, etc., even the nature of theology itself. In spite of all of that, there remains the suspicion that Smith, deepest down, was no theologian at all, that when he spoke of theology he did not quite mean what the word ordinarily means to ordinary people; or perhaps better, that he did not have quite the sympathy for it that his language often suggests. It is difficult to express this apparent contradiction without calling it a paradox in Smith himself perhaps more than in his actual argument. It is a thing sensed or felt, a reading between Smith's lines sometimes more than a reading of them. The impression can nonetheless be substantiated by reference to a passage like the following.

> Systematic theology, the sort of theology of which the Westminster Confession and the Thirty-nine Articles are compends, may be called the abstract theory of the truths of religion. It tries to refer the facts and experiences of the religious life, and the whole method of revelation and redemption, to general principles, and to explain all details under these principles in a philosophical and logical sequence. In doing this systematic theology goes beyond the Bible, although it builds upon it. The abstract terms which it uses, the philosophical notions which it develops, are often not Biblical. The Bible did not need them, because, for the most part, it abstains from systematic and philosophic discussions, and treats of the relations of God to man and the work of redemption in a directly experimental manner.[352]

For this reason, Smith went on, we have no exposition in Scripture of the doctrine of the Trinity or theories of the Person or Nature of Christ as we have in the early creeds. "In place of such abstract and theoretical discussion, the Bible sets before us the living Christ

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[352] Ibid., pp.10-11.

in experimental manifestation, as He actually lived and taught, suffered and rose again; . . .[353]

The impression is that theology for Smith really is a kind of necessary evil at very best, required in order to avoid the twin curses of individualism and sectarianism, but certainly nowhere near the heart of a living relationship with Christ. A real union with Christ is experimental and access to Him, insofar as it is mediated by the Scriptures, is historical.

It is tempting to say that Smith was too much a purist to be a theologian; perhaps better, too much a pure scientist. He wanted both a direct relationship with God and an almost unlimited scientific freedom. He would not allow his relationship to God to become a matter of theological abstractions, nor his investigations to be trammelled by theological notions. Somehow, somewhere, he seems to be saying, if not at present or in his own experience, the science and the religion will show themselves to be in harmony. The two are not united simply by folding them together in theological statement, emasculating both thereby. To limit one's examination of Scripture by allusions to "a reverence for God's word" would be to hinder progress, just as to ensconce one's relationship with Christ in doctrinal formulations would only reflect the unreality of that relationship. Perhaps what Smith was not fully appreciative of is the possibility that theology might be the only means by which an alliance between the claims of faith and those of science could be negotiated, unless, as we have suggested, he did not wish to have them negotiated. At any rate there is, in spite of the quite impressive evidence to the contrary, some support for the

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[353] Ibid., p.11.

conclusion, drawn, near the end of his life, by Smith himself: "I begin to think I can never have been a theologian."[354]

Faith And Criticism

The epithet "believing critic" fits Robertson Smith perhaps as it fits no one else. Everywhere in his work there is evidence of a keen dissatisfaction with anything less than a strong personal union with a living Christ and everywhere the same restless concern for the progress of knowledge freed from torpid tradition or strangling system. But neither his religion nor his research were to be cut off from the life of the Church. Smith saw himself firmly rooted in the present communion of the saints as well as that of all those who had gone before and who together make up the Church universal. His special appeal however was always to the Reformers for both his faith and his method. He considered himself intellectually as well as spiritually a thoroughly Protestant, as opposed to a medieval, Christian; and what he disagreed with most in his more rigorously Calvinist brethren was what he termed their medievalist views of both belief and the Bible, not the least of which was their determination, as he saw it, to lock up both faith in the Word of God and the study of it in dogmatic considerations. Not that he disavowed theology; rather that he saw it never as final or determinitive, but ever as evolving,

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[354] Life, pp.534-535. The remark was made in reply to a request that he list the theologians who had influenced him. His answer is illuminating. He names A. B. Davidson, Rothe, Ewald, Ritschl and John Bruce. "Then, of men of past ages, Luther certainly; Calvin, I suppose, had an influence, but I can't place it very well in my present resulting state of thought. I don't think any of the Fathers ever did much for me; the influence of Augustine was chiefly negative. I don't think I can count any of the Systematic Theologians - not even Ames, though I admired his clear dialectic." Incidentally, there is in Smith a conspicuous preponderance of Lutheran as opposed to Calvinist theologians - intriguing subject-matter for, alas, yet another thesis on Smith.

expressing as precisely as possible the faith of the present in the light of the past as it moved toward a fuller realisation of catholic unity. He felt no primary urgency, either, to defend the gains already won. The best defense, he might have said, is an aggressive offense. We can, we must, welcome the honest sifting of facts, precisely because, inasmuch as true faith is not a matter of proofs and evidences, inquiry cannot destroy, only build it up. Faith and criticism therefore go hand in hand.

The subject of the inspiration of Scripture, Smith maintained, should be wholly excluded from the sphere of apologetics and relegated to dogmatic theology. Indeed it should be discussed altogether under the means of grace, because it is in its living power that the Bible brings us face to face with Christ, not in the fact of its inspiration proven in theological controversy.[355] Our faith does not rest on the Bible as an infallible book, he declared, but in the historic manifestation of God in Christ; and once we understand that we shall no longer be constantly uneasy at the progress of criticism in Scripture. "We shall not hesitate to test the doctrine of inspiration like every other doctrine of Christianity with all the impartiality and calmness and by all additional light that science or criticism can cast upon it."[356]

It is easy enough to appreciate Smith's chief concern here, which is to fasten our attention on the fundamental distinction between God's actual revelation and the record of it, and to press upon us the need to choose as the basis of our Christianity not the record but the historical facts of the revelation themselves.[357] It is counsel

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[355] Lectures and Essays, pp.133-134.

[356] Ibid., p.134.

[357] Ibid.

worth heeding: a faith in nothing but the verifiability of certain historical events, no matter how significant they may be, with no corresponding personal knowledge of the One who is their subject, is not religious faith at all. But what Smith meant by "testing the doctrine of inspiration like every other doctrine of Christianity" is not immediately obvious. Did he rather mean the doctrine of infallibility, or, perhaps yet more amenable to "testing", the doctrine of inerrancy? Even if he did, in what way is "every other doctrine of Christianity" tested "with all impartiality and calmness and by all additional light that science or criticism can cast upon it"? The Incarnation? The Atonement? The Resurrection? Either Smith's own thinking was not completely clear at this point, or, what is more likely, he really believed that such doctrines could be tested scientifically, in the sense that any and all historical research would only substantiate what was already believed on other grounds - or at least that whatever were the results of critical study, they could not undermine that which is not believed, in the first instance, on the basis of its verifiability anyway.

Probably Smith thought both, both that, in the end, in whatever way research touched such doctrines, it could only serve to add to our knowledge of them, and that, in any case, as he put it, "a personal faith lies too deep to be touched by criticism."[358] In fact, in what is a remarkable reversal of the traditional formula, Smith averred that "all historical certainty rests ultimately on personal belief" and added that "no attack on the Gospel history can have such a personal weight as is at all comparable to the Christian's conviction of the reality of the historical Christ."[359] Again the point is well taken:

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[358] Ibid.

[359] Ibid.

genuine faith simply must have better, indeed other grounds than "historical evidence."

But surely Smith's language invites the allegation that for all of his emphasis on the necessity of coming to grips with the barest of the Bible's historical facts, he did not, ultimately, take history completely seriously. At least there is room for the conclusion that he did not take the study of history completely seriously, or how are we to understand his saying that "all historical certainty rests ultimately on personal belief"?

Smith has no doubt done us a very great favour in directing our attention to the ineffable reality of our relationship with God in Christ and therefore its practical impregnability against attacks from almost every quarter. But as an historian, even a Christian historian, is he on safe ground when he, in effect, makes the personal Christ the authenticator, as it were, of the historical Christ? Devotionally speaking, one can fully appreciate him saying that "no attack on the Gospel history can have such a personal weight as is at all comparable to the Christian's conviction of the reality of the historical Christ." But is this not to miss the point? Granted that my union with Christ is utterly real and precious and not to be compared with mere historical evidences and is, in that sense, unassailable, does that mean that Gospel history, or attacks on it, are relatively unimportant, as his words suggest? Has Smith not compared two different kinds of "weights", the personal weight of the Christian's conviction and the weight of attacks on gospel history?

He is right of course in saying that personal conviction cannot be compared with historical evidence, in the sense that the former is much more profound and therefore superior to the latter. But is that

not because, in part, the two cannot be compared at all? One is evidence of one type and the other of another type. At the same time they bear on one another in a way which Smith seems not fully to appreciate. At least he seems not fully to appreciate the bearing of evidence on conviction. That is due no doubt in part to the fact that for Smith the historical Christ and the experienced Christ are one and the same. And of course if Christianity really means what it says, they are. But has not Smith, in a paradoxical kind of way, really separated them in trying to identify them? By saying that however much the Christ of gospel history is attacked our personal Christ remains yet real and unimpugned, has he not relegated the historical Christ to a time and place which is more or less the province of mere academicians and thereby reckoned Him a different Christ from the one whom we know in the profound reality of present experience? Smith, it appears, has not given to "evidences" and "proofs" the importance which his own preeminently historical approach to the Scriptures would seem to require.

But perhaps all of this is explainable in the light of what appears to be a kind of optimism about what the results of scientific research would ultimately be. We can never doubt that Scripture gives us all that is required to attain a true image of our Lord, Smith said, even if we are not able to satisfy ourselves of its infallibility.[360] And if criticism, scientific or historical, should lay bare the fallibility of Scripture, it "will have done us the good service of removing a false impression which, as false, could not fail to be most injurious to the full understanding and even a stumbling-block in a way of a true belief of Christianity."[361] Smith seemed to be

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[360] Ibid.

[361] Ibid., pp.134-135.

fully persuaded that the very worst criticism could do was either give evidential support to that which was after all existential (in the modern and popular sense) at its deepest centre, or drive away all false fears that the Bible might be proven wrong. One feels too that Smith was fairly sure that when all was said and done the Bible would stand just as intact, both in its historicity and its ability to communicate spiritual truths, as ever it had done under the aegis of the "defenders of Scripture." What seems to be an extravagance of language in his assault on the older dogmaticians may very well be grounded in a belief that in the end of the day the Bible would be found standing even more erect under his handling than under theirs, and probably with not too different a look either.

T. K. Cheyne once remarked that Smith had sometimes "ventured upon unsafe statements." He had done so, Cheyne suggested, "from over-subtlety, a pardonable self-confidence, and a desire to keep in touch with old-fashioned theologians, . . ."[362] Cheyne did not indicate what statements he had in mind or in what way he considered them unsafe. Indeed Cheyne himself has no small reputation for making statements that were less than cautious.[363] But his assessment of the sources of Smith's weaknesses is nonetheless discerning enough. For there is an important sense in which the connections Smith makes, between for example faith and evidences, are in fact over-subtle - unless of course we maintain that the connections are not made at all.

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[362] T. K. Cheyne, "Professor Lindsay's Article on Professor W. Robertson Smith's Doctrine of Scripture", The Expositor, vol. X, 1894, p.371.

[363] Owen Chadwick, for instance, speaks of wise leaders seeing "how a revolutionary like Cheyne caused alarm, and delayed the slow acceptance of the new knowledge" and of how Cheyne's scholarship about the Old Testament "grew more and more unbalanced during the nineties, . . ." The Victorian Church (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1972), Part II, pp.105-107. A. S. Peake goes as far as to say that his Old Testament criticism "crossed at last the boundary beyond which sanity ceases." D.N.B., 1912-1921, p.120.

That is, they seem to require a particular view of the problem which amounts to something more like apprehension than comprehension; and although they have a certain very real cogency as rhetoric they fail when the attempt is made to work them out in practical detail. Smith's "pardonable self-confidence" too is evidenced in the boldness with which he takes up the causes of "the newer faith" (which is of course in Smith's view the older faith) and the newer criticism. He not only believed in his own ability to work out whatever kinks there might be in their relationship to one another, but also - and this is more important - in the surety of God's eventual vindication of both.

Most interesting however is Cheyne's reference to Smith's desire to keep in touch with the older theologians. Given Cheyne's own "growing recklessness" in this period (as Peake called it), the comment, from Cheyne's point of view, no doubt involved less irony than it would have done for anyone looking at it from the other side - the arch-heretic wanting to keep in touch with old-fashioned theologians! Still there is something in it. For there is all through Smith the impression that what he was attempting, really, was simply to beat his predecessors at their own game, to do the [redacted] thing they wanted to do but do it differently, but, more importantly, better, and that if, somehow - the mood of the church, the intellectual climate of the times and his own awkward personality notwithstanding - he could have had their blessing, he would not have refused it.[364]

As Smith saw it, he was not throwing in with the forces of this world, but rather moving out to conquer them for Christ. In a declaration

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[364] This is not of course an altogether novel conclusion, but simply another aspect of what is generally recognised as the problem or paradox in Smith, i.e. the combination of the revolutionary and the conservative in him. Cf., for instance, S. A. Cook, "Centenary of the Birth on 8th November 1846 of The Reverend Professor W. Robertson Smith", p.16; also Life, pp.537f.

which is as much a statement of his conception of the theological process as it is of his vision for its future, he said:

> The root of a true apologetic must be in the immediate certainty of Christian faith wherein we feel ourselves supernaturally brought into fellowship with a divine personality; and the scientific development of our apologetic must take the form of a speculative theology in which the subjective consciousness of redemption is objectively evolved into a harmonious theory of the universe as reconciled to God in Christ. It is the business of Christianity to conquer the whole universe to itself and not least the universe of thought.[365]

He then quoted the German Lutheran Dorner, "one of the most truly Christian of modern theologians": "The more thoroughly the yet hostile territories are conquered for Christianity and the Christian view of the universe, the more secure is our faith from these attacks."[366] That conquest would not be effected however, Smith declared, if faith in Scripture was the ground or the first condition of our faith in Christ, or a substitute for it.

> Were communion with the Bible to fill for us the place of communion with Christ, we should treat the Bible with superstition and be guilty of sin against Christ who is Lord and Master of the Scripture, and not less against Scripture which seeks only to be His minister to lead us up to Christ and to keep us close to Him.[367]

In a sense Smith's vision is grander, because it is more optimistic than those whose favour T. K. Cheyne alleged he was wanting to court. In the same sense he reveals perhaps an even more intense evangelical hope and zeal than they do: he seems to see a day when all of the best thought, the most advanced thought, will also be Christian thought, when the freest criticism will go on apace, contributing to and not hindering the faith of Christ, precisely because men have stopped

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[365] Lectures and Essays, p.135.

[366] Ibid. Issac August Dorner (1809-1884).

[367] Ibid., p.136.

defending the Bible and have opened it up, allowing its Word the liberty to storm the world.[368]

If this was Smith's vision, as it appears to have been, it would have been considered naive rather than optimistic by his opponents; also wrong, in no small part, of course, because, as they would have argued, it was grounded in a fundamental misconception, namely that a regenerating faith in the person of Christ could be separated from faith in the word of Christ. It is inconceivable, they alleged, that the Christ whom we call Lord and in union with whom we have life, should be ignored when He speaks on matters such as Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch or Isaiah's of the second half of the book which bears his name. The sixth specific charge against Smith in fact had been "Ignoring Christ's Testimony to Old Testament Authorship."[369] According to the traditionalists it would be absurd, to put it no worse, to think that Christ would allow, let alone give sanction to, a completely free handling of the Scriptures to which He himself paid heed.

But of course Smith was not thinking of <u>any</u> free handling of Scripture. He was thinking of his own handling of Scripture, at least

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[368] One of Smith's strongest and most extended statements on the need to study theology in a scientific way, out of the exclusive preserve of denominational Divinity Halls (such exclusiveness he believed to be a modern practice) can be found in a letter, "The Theological Chairs", he wrote to <u>The Scotsman</u>, 30th March, 1883.

[369] Interestingly, in his reply to this charge Smith maintained only that "it is irrelevant because it is not accompanied by express reference to the texts of Scripture, whose witness I am held to reject." He did not mention Christ, only Paul. "Thus Dr. Rainy said at last Assembly that while he believed in the unity of Isaiah he could not take the references to Paul as conclusive against an opposite view. . . . Does anyone but a pedant think it necessary, whenever he cites a book, to pause and point out that the name by which it is recognised is merely conventional?" "Answer", pp.62-63.

that of regenerate men. And for all his distinctions between believing and unbelieving criticism, one sometimes wonders if he really thought any criticism could ever be wholly negative. He seems always to assume that the same reverence, if not for Christ, at least for honesty, which animated and formed the basis for his own critical work, animated and formed the basis for critical work in general; or to put it another way, that somehow scientific zeal and religious zeal, if they were not exactly the same, would, in the end, be found to have met. Even the critics whom he acknowledged to be "uncompromisingly radical" and with whom therefore he declined to work in "scientific fellowship" ("It is absurd to ask for scientific fellowship where there are radically opposite aims.") he believed to be honestly seeking the truth; and "like all truth-seekers", he said, "they must in some measure be truth finders; . . ."[370] Therefore, he argued, "our theology can only gain in firmness of foundation and accuracy of construction by being confronted with a bold and consistent development of opposing principles."[371]

Smith's belief in scientific procedure was unquestioning, as unquestioning nearly, as it was in the Scripture to which he applied it. Or more accurately: between the two he acknowledged no disparity. Once, at least, he addressed himself precisely to the question:

> But is it true that the principles of modern criticism are opposed to the principles of a living faith? Is it true that science and religion have parted company, even on the field of the Old Testament? Is the Bible really such a book that its worth for the Church is undermined when its history and ideas are examined by the aid of the very methods of historical and literary criticism which have shed a flood of light on every other part of ancient history and ancient literature?[372]

His answer was based on the truth that the personal relation of God to

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[370] Lectures and Essays, pp.251-252.

[371] Ibid.

[372] "The Progress of Old Testament Studies", The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. XXV (1876), p.486.

man is a historical one, bound up in time and space and subject to all the limitations pertaining thereto. The Bible therefore can only be understood in that light. That is what the Reformers, as opposed to the Medievalists, discovered. Whereas the Medievalists thought they were seeing the Bible from the Divine side, the Reformers began to realise that they must see it, as men can only see it, from the human side. In a phrase which for Smith is uncharacteristically technical, he put it thus: "The teleology of revelation is divine; but the pragmatism of the revealing history must be human."[373] And then he rather summarised the kind of scientific-yet-not-scientific dualism which seems to run all through his work. On the one hand, he said:

> No amount of study can add anything to the communication of God to man in the Old Testament dispensation. It could not be left to the science of the interpreter to bring that out; for man knows God only in so far as God has declared himself. No study can add a jot to the manifestation of God in Scripture.[374]

On the other hand:

> What biblical science can do to throw a fuller light on the plan of redemption is simply to reconstruct, by the ordinary methods of historic-psychological combination, the human compliment of the divine manifestation. But if we can trace the process of the Old Testament religion completely from the side of psychology and human history, the divine elements in the process will take their proper place of themselves, unless with arbitrary rationalism we forcibly thrust them aside.[375]

The last phrase is significant: only an arbitrary rationalism, consciously and forcibly employed, will keep the divine elements out of a study of the Old Testament, even when it is approached from the

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[373] Ibid., p.489.

[374] Ibid.

[375] Ibid.

"purely human" side. Only the introduction, from the outside, in an unnatural kind of way, of alien presuppositions, will prevent the honest inquirer from seeing God in history. It is further evidence of Smith's implicit faith that science, well and truly applied, would vindicate biblical religion.

But to return to Smith's dualism. No amount of study, he contended, can reveal anything more than God has already revealed in His Word: "On that head the Bible statements are not only authoritative, but complete."[376] And yet somehow the most thorough-going criticism is required. At least it is efficacious and proper: "For it is the postulate of all moral religion, that God communicates himself to man in such a way that his revelation is interwoven with history without violence or breach of psychological law."[377]

Dualism may be too strong a word for what sometimes seem Smith's parallel approaches to Scripture, the direct or personal/spiritual and the scientific. For they do really come together in his belief that the latter will always elucidate and validate the former. But it is never convincingly explained why critical study can ever be considered anything more than a merely useful supplement to faith, as opposed to something absolutely essential to it.[378]

One recent and otherwise sympathetic commentator has said of

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[376] Ibid.

[377] Ibid.

[378] It is not being suggested that Smith should be faulted because he failed perfectly to explain what may be after all the inexplicable relationship between Christian scholarship and Christian spirituality, between head and heart. On the other hand, those who argued, rightly or wrongly, that the Bible itself was the Word of God - in the sense that its words are His only words to us - would seem to be in a logically, if not theologically or psychologically, more tenable position than Smith when they argued that the closest scrutiny of Scripture was absolutely essential for spiritual grôwth.

Smith's work:

> The admission of historical errors in the Bible was particularly damaging to a theory that emphasized the historical nature of the revelation and justified the Bible precisely as a historical record. Also the relation of the objective historical account to the subjective revelation by the Holy Spirit was never clearly defined. It is difficult to see how Smith maintained his belief that God revealed Himself to the unlearned as well as to the learned in the Bible in the face of his understanding that the Bible was a collection of historical source material in such disorder that the religious history was not evident even in its broad outlines without the most exhaustive study utilizing the best techniques of philological and historical science.[379]

It is somewhat more complicated than that, but overall the point is well made. It is more complicated in that Smith never contended that Bible history was in disorder. His argument was that it was in disorder only to those who tried to interpret it by pushing it through a theological grid; it was ordered, as any historical document is, to those who approach it historically, i.e., according to its nature.

The relationship between the learned and the unlearned, however, is a matter with which Smith never really comes to terms, and it is bound up with the relationship between the objective historical account and the subjective revelation of the Holy Spirit. Smith drew a distinction between "the plain, central, heartfelt truths that speak for

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[379] Glover, Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century, pp.124-125, It ought to be said that Glover's excellent book, which Bailey, (in his Yale Dissertation, p.235) refers to as "the only appraisal /of Smith's career/ approaching a full-scale discussion to appear in the second half of this century", while it looks at Smith in a critical way, is probably weaker on Smith - supported by less actual reference to Smith's writings - than any other topic with which it deals. This is due no doubt to the fact that its special province is "Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century" and not Scottish Church history. Nonetheless I tend to agree with Glover's assessment of Smith, as Bailey does not (See Bailey's critique of Glover, Bailey, pp.236-237.).

themselves and rest on their own indefeasible worth" and the results of critical research into their background.[380] He argued that the unlearned need know no more concerning the Laws of Deuteronomy than that they were God's teaching to His people of old, and are therefore still spoken by God to him. The ordinary reader in fact never observes that the Laws are put dramatically into Moses' mouth and the critical theories will probably appear to him to be very far-fetched. The witness of the Holy Spirit does not cover such questions as are raised by scholarship, and what is not covered by the Holy Spirit is not the concern of faith.[381]

Doubtless what Smith says is, in some sense, true. There is a simple message which anyone can understand. Criticism does not, indeed it cannot, change that, although it may equip us with a fuller insight. Yet it is difficult not to see in Smith's argument a potential widening of the gap which it was surely his whole business to close, that namely between a critical study of the biblical text and a real participation in the converse between God and man of whose history the Bible is the record. Not infrequently he sets divine message and results of study apart, making the latter, in effect, merely a means of understanding details and setting. Ironically and despite considerable and fairly persuasive argument to the contrary, history and the critical study of it seem to have no very essential relationship to faith. Even the argument that the Church's need for a theology - which is in turn a need for a diligent study of Scripture by a specially trained cadre of critics, theologians and historians - does not really invalidate the main point, because in the final analysis,

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[380] The Old Testament in the Jewish Church (1881), pp.28-29.

[381] "Answer", p.42.

as we have tried to show, Smith seemed to regard the theological enterprise itself with a similar indifference or mild disaffection, next to an experimental union with Christ a necessary evil at best.

Still, Smith was undeniably both believing and critical. He held that a proper understanding of Scripture could be had only by those who saw in it more than merely the gradual steps by which institutions grew up and doctrines were developed; for the life of the whole Old Testament history, he maintained, is the actual presence of God to man for the realisation of his gracious purpose, which was the establishment of the eternal kingdom of Christ. "The critic who shuts his eye to this, never gets beyond what I may call the anatomy of the dead body. And a man who has never seen life, will not be first-rate, even as an anatomist."[382] But then in a statement which is as succinct and apt as he ever made on the subject, he fairly summed up the fundamental difference in attitude between himself and the older theologians and underlined his commitment to science, even of the rationalist sort.

> But if his dissections are careful and conscientious, he will get results far more useful to science, than the man who wishes to explain everything by the teleology of life without familiarising himself with the organism through which life exerts itself.[383]

Even if it is unbelieving, in that it fails to take account of God's providence in its study of history, scientific criticism in the end has more to contribute to an understanding of Scripture than a more or less strictly exegetical/theological approach, no matter how believing it is. But of course criticism which is also believing is the ideal.

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[382] "The Progress of Old Testament Studies", The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. XXV (1876), pp.489-490.

[383] Ibid.

The critical study of Scripture, in Smith's view, affords the church two distinct advantages. First, it confirms our belief that God is always in contact with the growing spiritual needs of His people. As we begin to see how God adapted Himself to their needs throughout history, we are given confidence for the present. Second, it sets the authority of Scripture on a surer footing, because only the critical school has recognised that God's Word is shown to be His word, not by proofs, but because "every word of God is in it set forth in that living relation to the history of the church in which it was first grasped by faith as a sure word of God revealed by the Holy Spirit alone."[384] In The Prophets of Israel, the lectures which he styled "a contribution to the popularisation of modern Biblical science", he affirmed his conviction that it was "manifestly absurd" to think that the very best use of the Bible could be made by those who read it for the nourishment of their devotional life, so long as the history of the revelation which it contains is imperfectly understood.

> In the interests of religion, as well as sound knowledge, it is of the highest importance that everything which scholarship has to tell about the Old and New Testaments should be plainly and fully set before the intelligent Bible reader. The timidity which shrinks from this frankness, lest the untrained student may make a wrong use of the knowledge put into his hands, is wholly out of place in Protestant Churches, and in modern society, which refuses to admit the legitimacy of esoteric teaching.[385]

There again - "In Protestant churches, and in modern society" - is the ever-present link, as he believed it to be, between progress and true religion. It is a bold and invigorating optimism, full of hope for the future of both science and Christian faith, precisely because the

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[384] Ibid., pp.492-493.

[385] The Prophets of Israel (1881), p. viii.

two were never, in Smith's opinion, fundamentally at odds.

Not much more need be said in proof of the profound integrity or the remarkable zest of his criticism, whatever may have been its occasional ambiguities or inconsistencies. Regarding his faith perhaps it remains simply to record again his oft-quoted testimony.

> If I am asked why I receive Scripture as the Word of God, and as the only perfect rule of faith and life, I answer with all the fathers of the Protestant Church, "Because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God, because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near to man in Christ Jesus and declaring to us, in Him His will for our salvation. And this record I know to be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul."[386]

Smith's Preaching And Sermons

William Robertson Nicoll said of his friend Smith that "to understand his view of faith it was advisable to hear him preach."[387] It is a discerning remark. And while it is applicable in some degree to any Christian scholar who also preaches, it is perhaps especially applicable to Smith. For in Smith's sermons one gets a much finer and fuller feel for the nature of his faith and what he considered faith to be than in any bare description he could give of it. In them also one sees something more of the relationship, or the seeming lack of relationship, between his faith and his criticism.

Apart from Nicoll's remark, references to either Smith's preaching or to his sermons are limited. One of a very few is Black and Chrystal's. It must be admitted, they say, that his bent was from the first almost entirely academic, but that he gradually became more comfortable as well as more successful both with the sophisticated Edinburgh congregations

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[386] "Answer", p.21.

[387] W. Robertson Nicoll, Princes of the Church, p.69.

and those of the country parishes. They also add, correctly, that while Smith was in considerable demand as a preacher, his sermons cannot be said to form a distinguished contribution to homiletical literature. "Their most remarkable characteristic, in fact, is their conventionality. They might have been delivered by any orthodox country minister to any Scottish congregation."[388] But what Smith's biographers regard as the particularly undistinguished character of his sermons, and the reason they discuss them almost not at all, is the most important thing about them. It is precisely their "old-fashioned evangelicalism", as they term it, which says most about Smith's persuasions.

Smith was of course a minister of the Free Church of Scotland. It was required of all Free Church Professors that they also be ordained. He never had a charge, however, having been given the Professoriate in an almost unprecedented move but a year following his graduation from New College. And while it is one of the important questions of his life and career whether he should have been entrusted with the responsibility of training ministers without ever having been one himself, it is a fact that he could preach and, apparently, quite effectively. Most of his sermons were delivered during the years of his trial and large crowds came to hear him, in part no doubt out of curiosity. But if they expected to hear something startling or dangerous, they were disappointed. It is reported in fact that the saintly Horatius Bonar heard him and questioned his sincerity, so orthodox was what he said.[389]

The Smith Collection contains some sixty items listed as sermons. Many are fragments, some are difficult to read and most are short, being merely sketches or outlines. There are eight or ten at the most that would even be long enough to publish, assuming they were considered

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[388] Life, p.124.

[389] Strahan, Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.247. See also Life, p.125.

good enough. With the possible exception of one or two, however, they are not good enough, in part for exactly the reason Black and Chrystal suggest. But even conventionality in the sense of "old-fashioned evangelicalism" need not mean lacking in interest or power to edify. Still it is true that Smith's sermons are not great or even particularly good literature. They are not sermons whose efficacy can be reproduced in print, as A. B. Davidson's, for instance, can.[390]

What strikes one in reading through them is two things. One is their almost conspicuously un-academic quality. There is hardly ever a reference to the history of a verse or to its context; even rarer is any mention of a "critical" problem connected with it. Moreover Smith almost never dealt with what might be considered a difficult passage. In that sense the sermons are very conventional indeed. The other thing that strikes one is the already mentioned orthodoxy. But orthodoxy is not quite the right word, for the reason that they are seldom doctrinal at all. If we mean by orthodox simply free from heresy then it is true, they are orthodox. But if we mean sound, in the sense that Smith's primary intention was correctly to expound the text, the word is not the best one. Smith's sermons are devotional more than didactic, certainly topical more than exegetical, but mostly, attempts to persuade or encourage or edify, but not to teach. They are, on the whole, very simple, remarkably so for one who could have been, and may have been expected to be, as erudite from the pulpit as he was from his desk or lectern.

Smith preached on Old Testament passages, but when he did it was

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[390]Only one of Smith's sermons was published, a sermon on Luke 19.5 preached in St. George's Free Church, Edinburgh on 27 May, 1877 (Edinburgh: Maclaren and Macnivin, 1877).

almost always from either the Psalms or Isaiah.[391] The bulk of his sermons are from the New Testament, equally divided between the gospels and Paul with one from Hebrews and one from I Peter. What he said in his sermons always corroborated what he said elsewhere, especially about the nature of faith. But as they are homilies and not lectures they often touch on issues not treated in books or essays and open up dimensions of Smith's Christianity not available in other places. The character of the sermons may be suggested by referring to their four or five outstanding themes.

First, and the single most developed, is the supremacy of an utter commitment and devotion to Christ. It is not the head but the heart that matters, not doctrinality but spirituality. In what is one of his earliest but also one of his longest and best sermons Smith said:

> It is not knowing about Christ not believing truths about Christ that is the mark of grace in the heart. We must know the Lord himself know him as his disciples knew him, so know his love and grace that we open our hearts to receive God's free gift and determine to hold to that gift fast come of us what may. And then we must take Christ not only as our Saviour but as our king. We must give up our whole being to him.[392]

In another on I Thess. 4.13-5.10 he remarked that the Thessalonians had need of knowledge and their lack of knowledge led them astray, but no knowledge will enable us to live a Christian life if we have

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[391] Thirteen out of forty-five sermons listed with texts are from the Old Testament and only two of the thirteen are not from either the Psalms or Isaiah. (There is one on I Kings 13 and one on Ecclesiastes 1.4). Not more than one or two touch on a critical problem: K.12 on Isaiah 60.18 has brief remarks on the interpretation of prophecy.

[392] K. 29. The W. Robertson Smith Collection, Cambridge University Library. All the sermons are listed under K and K is part of the collection labled ADD. 7476. The sermons are listed in canonical order. This one was on Rom. 5.20, 21. The quotations given here are reproduced exactly as they stand in the manuscripts.

not Christian faith, if we do not know Christ Jesus for our Redeemer and if our hearts are not filled with love for him and a desire for the coming of his Kingdom.[393] It is love for Christ, and a willingness to give up all for Him that constitutes true Christian discipleship. This emphasis is everywhere in Smith's sermons. There is no need to multiply quotations, but one more to secure the point and underline the fervour of the language which Bonar found almost too evangelical to believe. In a long and certainly publishable sermon on Matt. 6.31-33 he said:

> Only in the love of him who died for us and rose again, can we find the treasure before which all earthly treasures shall fade; only in the certainty that he is with us can we find strength to suffer the loss of all things that we may win Christ.[394]

Second, there is a heavy accent on the eminently individual and spiritual nature of the Christian life. In this Smith was utterly Pauline. In the longest and most often preached of all his sermons (twenty-three times between 1873 and 1881) he made it clear that as Christians we are not to conduct our lives on the basis of any kind of formal or social, even Christianly social, command, but on the basis of the will of God as we in faith and conscience know it to be. Sometimes the opinion of men, even Christian men, would constrain us to do things which are neither God's will for us nor in the best interests of themselves.

> The man who is doing right can walk boldly tho he walks alone; but the sinner is angry at every man who silently rebukes his sin by refusing to share it. This is particularly the case with those actions which without being plain sins stand on the dangerous ground between innocence

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[393] K. 40.

[394] K. 16.

> and guilt. For in such cases men forget the N.T. law to eschew every course on which the conscience is not quite clear - they forget that whatsoever is not of faith is sin.[395]

Fairly frequently throughout his sermons in fact Smith quoted Romans 14.23. The text of course, as that on which this particular sermon was based (Galatians 1.10), was very relevant to the period of his trial; it would serve as biblical support for his stand against the majority of opinion throughout his Church. Nonetheless his exposition of it indicates that he had a full grasp of the difference between Law and Grace as well as the finer distinction between that which is merely right and that which is the will of God personally and spiritually realised in the heart of the man of God.

Third, is Smith's understanding that merely human goodness is inadequate. In a sermon on the rich young ruler (Matt. 19.16-22) he remarked that when Jesus said there is none good but God He was plainly teaching that whatever goodness we possess must be derived from God.

> The goodness of God's people is not their own goodness but God's goodness realised in them by the work of his own spirit. . . Out of God, without the Spirit working in him the ripest Christian is powerless to all good.[396]

The Law, he said in the same sermon, must be taken with the guidings of providence and the operations of God's Spirit: "To all men the Letter of the Law is the same, but the life in which God's Law is to guide us is different in every man." Smith's realisation that faith was individual and spiritual, combined with his recognition that goodness must come from God, comprises a thoroughly New Testament conception. He did not fail to stress the corporate nature of the faith - our conformity to Christ's holiness is possible only in contact with other

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[395] K. 33.

[396] K. 17. See also K. 35 on Ephesians 4.15.

believers, he said in a sermon on Heb. 12.14[397] - but overall the dominant themes have to do with personal rather than shared belief, and pleasing God rather than pleasing men.

Fourth, Smith's preaching is positive, optimistic even; and it is so precisely because the Christian life for him is spiritual and not legal. "Christ in you" was frequently on his lips. He seemed genuinely to desire for himself and to encourage in others a reality of spiritual power. If faith was not mere doctrine, no more was it simply deliverance from a future Hell, or even the enjoyment of a future Heaven. "Salvation is just victory not deliverance from wrath and hellfire merely" he said in one place.[398] And in another he urged his hearers to look not at themselves, not to ask whether they had faith enough, but to look to God. "Nay every movement Godward is God's gift and gives the right the duty to ask for more."[399]

There is enough in these selections to catch something of the flavour of Smith's preaching. Behind its conventionality and orthodoxy there are the more important features of its warm devotion to the Person of Christ and its conspicuous emphasis on faith as spiritual rather than either doctrinal or ethical. There are too the eminently Pauline themes of the insufficiency of even the best of merely human goodness and the encouragement of the possibility of a real and present power of Christ living in us.

The contrast between Smith's tone or style of preaching and that of his scholarly work is dramatic, much more dramatic than it is in either George Adam Smith or A. B. Davidson, and it serves better perhaps than anything else to accentuate the gap that seems to divide

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[397] K. 42.

[398] K. 46 on the kingship of Christ. (Italics are Smith's.)

[399] K. 10 on Isaiah 43.1, 2.

his faith from his criticism. Or maybe it is better described not in terms of a division between the two but rather in terms of a settled conviction about the absolute validity of both. No one should question the sincerity or the quality of Smith's faith. His sermons eloquently attest to both. But some, like Bonar, did, because the compatibility between the message he preached and the method he taught was never made plain. Still it remains true that to understand Smith's view of faith it was advisable to hear him preach.

One final comment. According to the dates on the sermons, which he diligently recorded every time each was given, Smith never preached after 1881. There is no reason to believe that this was the result of anything more than a very natural feeling that his ministry of preaching had come to an end with his removal to Cambridge, away from his geographical and spiritual home, and that the work God had given him to do (another topic to which he often referred in his sermons) had become exclusively that of scholarship. It was quite plainly his bent from the beginning. His failure to preach after he left Scotland is no evidence of a loss of faith, for as his biographers remind us, his sermons were the serious expression of a devout piety which he maintained to the last day of his life.[400]

Conclusion

One modern commentator has claimed that Smith "emphatically rejected natural theology, propositional revelation, an infallible Bible, and a static system of doctrine."[401] The claim of course was meant as a judgement. There may be a question, however, whether Smith himself would have taken it in that way. Nor can it stand without

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[400] Life, pp.124-125.

[401] Donald R. Nelson, "The Theological Development of the Young Robertson Smith", The Evangelical Quarterly, vol. XLV, No. 2, April - June, 1973, p.99.

certain qualifications. What Smith rejected was natural theology apart from Christian belief (i.e. used apologetically, as in arguments from "evidences"), revelation viewed as essentially or primarily propositional (would Smith have said that God never revealed truths?), an inerrant Bible (would he have ever argued that the Bible was fallible in matters of faith and practice?), and a system of doctrine which refused to develop beyond itself in accordance with current needs (after all, he continually looked back to the great Confessions as if they were, in some sense, normative). Nonetheless the judgement in a general way is correct. At the same time, assuming that he would have accepted it even on the broadest terms, Smith would have argued that his rejections were Biblical, Christian, Churchly and Protestant. Moreover he would have added that they were modern, in that they took account of the most recent results of scientific and historical research. In other words he would have argued that his own view of the relationship between God and man as transcendantly personal, and all that that implies for our doctrine of Scripture and our philosophy of history, was more in line with the theology of the Reformation and answered better to actual facts and spiritual requirements than did that way of thinking which he often referred to as Medieval.

There are, however, points on which Smith is open to criticism, more perhaps than on these with which he may have agreed and maybe even turned to his own advantage.

There is, first, his theory of development. The notion that all history is taken up in a "general progress of humanity" runs throughout Smith's work. The phrase is, in this instance, Smith's own.[402]

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[402] The Religion of the Semites, third edition (1927), p.26.

Whether he meant by it all that others meant by it is of course one of the central issues in the whole "Smith question." The answer is probably that he did and did not. What makes Smith a problem is precisely the tension between what would seem to be the logical conclusions of his mind and method and the requirements of his evangelical Protestant faith. Black and Chrystal refer to "the apparent inconsistency" between the general drift of the Burnett Lectures and the concluding paragraph of the last lecture of the (never published) third series. If the book means anything, they claim, it means that the process of religious evolution has been continuous.

> And yet, when the final stage is reached, the author invites us to believe that there is a great gulf fixed; that the religion of the chosen people differed not only in degree, but in kind from that of their near kindred, and that, quite apart from the miraculous and divine elements of the faith which is founded on the New Testament, the Old Testament Scriptures present a religious system in itself transcendentally differentiated from its fore-runners.[403]

The difficulty, in other words, is what Smith meant by phrases such as progress of humanity and progressive revelation. Where in Smith's view did revelation begin (and how did it begin?) and where, by the same token, did it end? Did it begin and end within the Revelation, or history of Revelation, the limits of which are set on one end by God's supernatural manifestation of Himself to, say, Abraham, and end

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[403] Life, p.537. Smith had ended the last of the Burnett Lectures by contrasting Israelite religion with other Semitic religions. His final remark was: "The burden of explaining this contrast does not lie with me. It falls on those who are compelled by a false Philosophy of Revelation to see in the Old Testament nothing more than the highest point of the general tendencies of Semitic religion. This is not the view which that study commends to me. It is a view that is not commended, but condemned by the many parallelisms in detail between Hebrew and heathen story and ritual; for all these material points of resemblance only make the contrast in spirit the more remarkable." Ibid., pp.536-537.

with the life, death and resurrection of Abraham's Seed? Or did it perhaps begin somewhere and somehow in a period pre-dating that of the history of Israel and by a process of evolution simply grow into the fullest bloom in Jesus of Nazareth, suggesting that perhaps it may yet progress even farther? The answer to that question is no doubt that Smith did not hold to an open-ended developmentalism. At least it seems pretty clear that his view of Christ as God's full and final revelation was as orthodox as anyone's. Still he had not made himself completely clear, as Black and Chrystal's remark indicates.

Smith believed that a theory of development would somehow vindicate biblical religion. At the end of his life, Cook tells us, Smith wrote to his friend Lindsay that he should like to live "that I may finish my book in which I intend to show to the world the divine Revelation of God in the Old Testament."[404] How he might have done so is exciting to think about. The fact is that he did not do so. Indeed he left the impression on the minds of his most loyal students and friends that he could not do so. To them it simply did not seem possible, not at least along the line he had taken.

The point is not whether they were right or wrong - their judgement may have been determined by their own philosophical or theological preferences - but simply that a theory of development of a sort not everywhere congenial to his Christian orthodoxy quite clearly dominates Smith's work. The fact is evidenced not only in his use of phrases such as "the general progress of humanity", but in his conviction, for

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[404] S. A. Cook, "Centenary of the Birth of W. Robertson Smith", p.16. G. W. Anderson points out that Nathan Söderblom, Lutheran Archbishop of Upsala (1914-1931) and student of comparative religion, said, on the last day of his life, "There is a living God, I can prove it by the History of Religions." "Two Scottish Semitists", p. xiv. Söderblom, incidentally, was also greatly influenced by Ritschl.

instance, that the divine purpose could never again be narrowed to "the petty world of which Judah was the centre." Or perhaps more especially in his handling of sacrifice and the death of Christ: the real problem with the New Testament doctrine of the Atonement was apparently that it was cast in terms which were evocative of a period when all spiritual and ethical ideas were "still wrapped up in the husk of a material embodiment."[405] Theology too, Smith argued, must ever develop in order for the church to grow into its as yet unrealised catholic unity. Everywhere there is the notion of progress or evolution, if not explicit then implicit, and though never formally declared or defended, determinative. Ultimately however, the serious issue is more than just the fact of his view. It is the way in which it runs so obviously and disturbingly close to the merely genetic explanations of the development of religious ideas he had condemned in Kuenen in the very first year of his Aberdeen Professoriate[406] and opens up the vexed question of whether or not his theological moorings had shifted over the years.[407]

There is, second, his apparent failure to take history absolutely seriously. The issue has already been dealt with at considerable

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[405] The Religion of the Semites, third edition (1927), p.439. This comes in a statement (pp.439-440) of Smith's conviction that it was the task of the ancient religions to free spiritual truths from their husk; and although some progress in this direction was made, especially in Israel, on the whole, none was able "to shake itself free from the congenital defect in every attempt to embody spiritual truth in material forms."

[406] See above, p. 128.

[407] Bailey contends that Smith's fundamental position did change, precisely in the direction of Kuenen's views, but an investigation into the relationship between Smith and Kuenen after 1882 he reserves for a later time. Bailey, dissertation, Chapter V.

length and needs only to be summarised here. In what is a professedly historical approach to the Bible, i.e. an approach which gives primary consideration to the circumstances in which its revelation either occurred or was delivered, it does not seem to matter to Smith as much as perhaps it ought whether events actually happened as recorded. This is what Glover meant in the passage already cited when he said that "The admission of historical errors in the Bible was particularly damaging to a theory that emphasised the historical nature of the revelation and justified the Bible precisely as a historical record." Nor does it seem to matter to Smith as much as it ought whether the predictions of the prophets were fulfilled in the concrete way the prophets apparently thought they would be, all of which is shown up best perhaps in his rather cursory treatment of the Messianic prophecies and his refusal to attempt to bring together the predictions of Isaiah 7, 9 and 11 and the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Smith's reasons must be considered of course. He maintained that as a historical student of prophecy the New Testament interpretation of the prophecies was no part of his business. From the one side it is an understandable point of view and is consistent with his justifiable aversion to a dogmatic approach to Scripture. Still one wonders if it really does justice either to the acutal language of the prophets' predictions or to the actual fulfilment of them in Christ with which any genuinely biblical method would have to come to terms.

All such failure in Smith has to do with the gap that seems to exist between his faith and his criticism. As has been mentioned perhaps too often already the link between his approach to the Bible which is essentially scientific and his relationship to God which is essentially personal is never clearly articulated. In other words what is missing is the theological link. It is missing in large

measure no doubt because there was apparently in Smith an "absence of the theological instinct from his intellectual composition" as his biographers put it.[408] Indeed it is just that third series of the Burnett Lectures, in which they found an anthropology so seemingly incompatible with an evangelical faith, which they refer to as "the final instalment which he was destined to give to the world of the eminently untheological erudition amassed by him."[409] Smith frequently distinguished between the plain heart-felt message of the Bible and the results of biblical scholarship and maintained that the latter did not and could not touch the former. It must be confessed, however, that for all of the truth of the distinction as regards religion in its devotional or personal aspect it seems somehow to undermine the very thing he set out to establish, namely the intimate if not absolutely necessary connection between a critical study of the Bible and a real participation in the converse between God and man of which the Bible is the record. He did not seem to appreciate the possibility that a thoroughly critical study of Scripture might alter what men have traditionally taken its heart felt message to be, which in turn suggests that perhaps in some very deep and even unconscious way he did not take the results of criticism altogether seriously either, because it had no part in his very real faith. If so then Black and Chrystal's comment concerning Paul de Lagarde that what he and Smith shared was "the most enthusiastic faith in the value of critical and philological inquiry as an accessory, or rather as a necessary foundation, of religious faith" is the exact opposite of the truth.[410]

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[408] Life, p.535.

[409] Ibid.

[410] Ibid., p.147.

No such criticism of Smith is meant to impugn the integrity or even the orthodoxy of his faith. Indeed no such criticism along these lines would be possible if the integrity of his faith were not taken for granted. Smith was a thoroughly believing critic. His apparent inconsistencies are inconsistencies only against a background of a professed orthodoxy. Moreover it must be kept in mind that there is a difference between the question whether his faith was in fact traditionally orthodox or in line with his critical procedure and the question whether he believed it to be. No doubt he believed it to be. He is culpable mostly on the grounds that he failed to ask how important doctrinal orthodoxy is and to what extent it might be impinged by the biblical method he espoused. And this failure is perhaps the key to the dilemma of his silence on the sacrifice of Christ. It was not so much that he did or did not hold a Ritschlian (as some have alleged) or any other view of the Atonement, but rather that that kind of doctrinality was not an essential ingredient, in his view, of faith. Often enough, and most often perhaps in his sermons, he made it clear that belief in Christ was not a matter of doctrine at all, but of love, devotion, and a willingness to give up everything for His sake. It is not Smith's personal faith in Christ that is in question.

Nor is it really his reverence for Scripture. Again his sermons are perhaps the best illustration of what he understood its authority to be. In his use of the Bible, as opposed to his criticism of it, he indicated that he took it very seriously indeed, hanging on every phrase, implication and word, not misusing it, but getting from it in the best and most honest homiletical style all that can be gotten from it. It is unfortunate that more of his manner if not his method in preaching did not grace his other public as well as his academic utterances.

But Smith was too much an individual; and although he clearly understood that the Church was the setting or context of personal piety - he addressed just this question in one or two of his sermons and in his discussion of theology - the heaviest stress both in his talk and in his practice was on individual faith. It was obviously somewhat of a problem for him to get the two sides together.[411]

Smith was also, first and foremost, a scholar. As such he rendered noble service and made long-lasting contributions to his own Church and to the Church at large. Perhaps his work was animated too much by reaction,however. It may have been simply the other side of his bold and hopeful modernity. It may be that such is always the unavoidable concomitant of any deeply felt need for a break with tradition. One cannot imagine Luther doing very much apart from a certain intemperance, not to say savagery, of feeling and language. But Smith's disposition hardly served the cause of the public relations which, in his case, were so absolutely necessary to effect the changes for which he gave his life. For, unlike the Reformers with whom he saw himself allied, his arena was as well educated a church as any in history, laity as well as clergy, and working its will by consensus. But not mere relationships alone suffered, or even the cause - as if questions of the sort raised by the Smith case are really resolvable into matters of ecclesiastical politics. The progress of scholarship itself, which was unquestionably Smith's own first love, may have been hindered. He unfailingly recognised the positive contributions of the critics, even those with whom he disagreed

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[411] See Lectures and Essays, p.147 for a particularly strong statement concerning the importance of the individual. It has already been noted that this theme was important in his sermons. Bailey too, in his dissertation, points out that "The relationship between private and corporate Christian life is not clearly described" in Smith (p.141).

on the most fundamental of philosophical and theological issues, and ever gave them credit for moral and spiritual integrity in the face of almost any heterodoxy. No doubt in this he took the better way. At the same time he rarely, if ever, conceded the same to his immediate predecessors. There are of course any number of good explanations. His role, from a historical point of view, was not to demonstrate his compatibility with his teachers, or his debt to them, but to sunder from them. Smith was not always treated as a brother either! All the same, one wonders if a good deal more sensitivity on his part would not, in every way, have profited more, not least in the elucidation of truth. It may be too much to ask of a man who never saw his fiftieth year.

A. B. Davidson's biographer, writing in 1917, said that Smith was "perhaps the rarest gift ever bestowed upon the Free Church", but his Church did not know how to use him. She made him a great scholar - "in pure scholarship the greatest she ever had" - but she put him into a Chair of Theology before she gave him the cure of souls. "She, with the best intentions, did him a cruel wrong at the beginning of his ministry, and it led to the tragic wrong at the end."[412] It is very far from being the answer to all the questions raised by Smith's case, life and work, but as far as it goes it is an insight that ought not to be left unrecorded. And yet what would have been the issue in the character and thinking of a personality like Smith's of seven years' work as an evangelist, assuming indeed that he would have lasted it? The answers are worth considering. More compelling is the other unanswerable question of the possible results of Smith's life-labour,

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[412] Strahan, Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.247.

had he been spared to see it through. Strahan deeply regretted that Smith did not live long enough to see old friendships restored and old breaches healed, but judged that had he lived to his threescore and ten he would have been "probably the most honoured name in all Scotland."[413] It is a handsome tribute, probably an accurate judgement. Benjamin Jowett, in quite a different mood, once spoke of the interpreter of Scripture in this way:

> He may depart hence before the natural term, worn out with intellectual toil; regarded with suspicion by many of his contemporaries; yet not without a sure hope that the love of truth, which men of saintly lives often seem to slight, is, nevertheless, acceptable before God.[414]

That from the famous Essays and Reviews article. Jowett's encomium may be thought apt for Smith, not least because Smith himself may have thought it apt; nor is it less than significant, considering its source.

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[413] Ibid., p.251.

[414] "On the Interpretation of Scripture", Essays and Reviews, second edition, (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1860), p.433.

Note On William Robertson Smith And Albrecht Ritschl

Smith's biographers refer to him as an "attached Ritschlian" and one of the main contentions of Warner Bailey's unpublished Yale Dissertation on "Theology and Criticism in William Robertson Smith" is that Ritschl provided the theological framework for Smith's critical study of the Bible.[1] But if this is so, the claim that Smith's was an attempt to marry evangelical orthodoxy with critical procedure may turn out to be merely conventional at best, or else an imprecise generalisation based on a superficial reading of either Smith or Ritschl or both. For if Smith really was Ritschlian in any thorough-going sense, and if, as H. R. Macintosh (amongst others) has claimed, Ritschl has not presented a biblical view of Christ's sacrifice in relation to God's holiness and man's sin,[2] then what Smith married to critical procedure was not evangelical orthodoxy at all, and the claim that "Smith's use of Ritschlian theology gave his higher critical work an orthodox theological stature"[3] would appear to be a non sequitur or a contradiction in terms.

According to Bailey, what Smith drew from Ritschl was the concept of the Bible as a record of God's condescending response to human need. Ritschl had started from man's consciousness of need rather than God's condemnation of sin, which in turn of course radically affected (or was affected by) both his notion of the nature of sin and of Christ's sacrifice.[4] But in doing so Ritschl has "turned the

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[1] Life, p.148; Bailey, chapter IV.

[2] H. R. Macintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Nisbet and Co., 1937), pp.158ff. Cf. Emil Brunner's note on p.282 of The Mediator translated by Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth Press, 1934), which Macintosh cites in support.

[3] Bailey, p.234.

[4] James Orr, The Ritschlian Theology and the Evangelical Faith (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), pp.136ff; also Macintosh, Types of Modern Theology, p.159ff.

Augustinian doctrine of Original Sin out of doors" in opposition to New Testament thought and made reconciliation, not something God has done, in virtue of which the sinful can come to be right with Him, but an experience of man, a distinction "wide as the poles - between 'objective' and merely 'subjective' views of Reconciliation."[5]

The question then is to what extent or in what sense did Smith appropriate Ritschl's "general scheme of need", as Bailey calls it. The answer turns in many instances on (1) how much of Ritschl's meaning is read in Smith's words and (2) how far Smith's use of the language of human need/divine satisfaction is reckoned to constitute the essence or totality of Smith's views of the nature of Reconciliation.

On the first point, as Bailey himself admits, there is a major problem. Nowhere in any of his works does Smith acknowledge an indebtedness to Ritschl.[6] Whatever is seen to be Ritschlian in Smith must therefore be a deduction from the influence of Ritschl on Smith based on their friendship and revealed in their correspondence or on the similarity of their views as evidenced in a comparison of their works.

That Ritschl and Smith were close friends and that Ritschl had a profound influence on Smith can hardly be doubted. That is clear from the Smith biography and the voluminous correspondence (much of it in German) carried on between them. Bailey has argued the same from a review of the letters of both men. Likewise, Bailey has shown fairly convincingly that Smith's understanding of Redemption as man's need satisfied by God's love is very much akin to Ritschl's - with this

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[5] Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology, pp.159-162.

[6] Bailey, p.210. In fact I cannot remember seeing, in Smith's published works, any mention of Ritschl whatsoever, although he mentions a host of other German theologians. SEE NOTE APPENDED TO FOOTNOTE 12, P.268, WHICH REFERS TO AN EXCEPTION TO THIS.

exception: "Smith has . . . not chosen to cast the explication of the need of man in Ritschlian language. Consistently he has interpreted the need of man in the classical Reformation terminology of radical sin and alienation, not in terms of nature and spirit."[7] But there is - at least there might very well be - a world of difference between need viewed as a man's failure to fulfil his goal in life, say, and need viewed as radical sin.[8] The language in which one chooses to cast the explication of a thing is altogether important. Earlier Bailey acknowledged that Smith probably took a more serious view of man as a sinner than Ritschl did[9] and that while Smith drew increasingly on the idea that religious knowledge occurred as one experienced the meeting of a spiritual need, "it must be kept in mind that Smith did not follow Ritschl's analysis of this need."[10]

The second point, how far Smith's use of the language of human need/divine satisfaction is reckoned to constitute the essence or totality of Smith's views of the nature of Reconciliation, involves similar problems. There is a sense in which any view of Reconciliation effected in Christ, even the most thorough-going penal-substitutionary view, might be seen in terms of a human need met by a divine satisfaction. That that was Smith's way of looking at the matter is not being argued here. There is almost no evidence that it was. Nevertheless it could be that Smith's doctrine of Reconciliation also had other dimensions, the expiatory for instance, to which, as we have shown, an occasional Smithian passage points.

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[7] Ibid., p.240.

[8] See Karl Barth's From Rousseau to Ritschl (London: SCM Press, 1959), pp.390-397, especially p.395, for an interpretation of Ritschl on this point.

[9] Bailey, p.225.

[10] Ibid., p.214.

On the other hand, it was precisely the thesis of the section on "Sacrifice and the Death of Christ" that Smith's references to a traditional doctrine of atonement were conspicuously scant, leaving us to wonder why he had not at least taken up the matter in more detail. It must be further admitted that a Ritschlian view of reconciliation might be a natural correlate of the other theme that plays such a decisive role in Smith's thinking, namely the essential nature of Christian belief as personal rather than either doctrinal or mystical. Still, a "general scheme of need" need not necessarily be taken as any more than an aspect of Ritschl's thought that is also implicit in the larger Reformation doctrine of Reconciliation as Smith interpreted it.

But all that is being broached here is that Smith's Ritschlianism, if taken in a profound way, would bring into serious question the popular assumption that Smith's aim was to bring together modern criticism and orthodox theology. There is no conclusive proof that it ought to be taken in that way. The most convincing evidence that it might be - apart from Smith's seeming reticence to persuade us to the contrary on the question of the Atonement - is Smith's famous remark that Ritschl was "Urvater of the Aberdeen heresy."[11] It is a significant and tantalising comment, but taken along with the acknowledged differences between Smith and Ritschl, not an altogether un-ambiguous one, unless by it Smith meant not too much more than that what criticism teaches us to look for in the Bible is simply the history of redemption.[12]

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[11] In a letter from Smith to Ritschl in February, 1877. Bailey, p.207; Life, p.247.

[12] Life, p.267. N.B. This "Note on William Robertson Smith and Albrecht Ritschl", as well as the section "Sacrifice and the Death of Christ," should be modified in the light of Smith's series of articles "Christ and the Angels" in The Expositor, second series, vols. I, II, and III (1881 and 1882), especially the final article on Hebrews 2.17, 18. I do not think they alter the substance of my assessment, however: it still remains true that Smith said conspicuously little about Christ's death in relation to Old Testament sacrifice.

CHAPTER FOUR

A. B. DAVIDSON: "THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE"

William Robertson Smith was and remains the dominant figure in the history of biblical criticism in the last century, certainly in Scotland, perhaps in Britain. But by every account it was Smith's teacher at New College, A. B. Davidson, who was, as George Adam Smith put it, "the power behind the throne." Even in the midst of the W. R. S. crisis, "men felt it was Davidson who was the real author of the greatest theological change that had come over Scotland for centuries."[1] T. K. Cheyne listed Davidson in his Founders of [redacted] Old Testament Criticism ("no one has done more to 'found' criticism, at least in Scotland, than this eminent teacher"),[2] and O. C. Whitehouse, reviewing Founders, modified its author's judgement only slightly:

> He and his illustrious pupil, Professor Robertson Smith, may be regarded as sharing with Cheyne the honour of being the real "Bahnbrecher" of our modern British Old Testament research by the work contributed by each during the eventful decade 1870-1880.[3]

Such is the consensus: Davidson either shares or takes himself the honour of starting modern biblical studies in Scotland. From there, by his students, it was spread throughout the island and elsewhere. Those who went to England, for instance, included W. G. Elmslie, John Watson, and John Skinner; other pupils were Henry Drummond,

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[1] George Adam Smith, "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson, D.D., LL.D." The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 3, September, 1902, p.174. The second half of the article came in the October number (No. 4) for the same year (also vol. XX), pp.288-297. Exactly the same article, minus a very few comments made for the American audience, appeared in The Union Magazine, vol. II, 1902.

[2] T. K. Cheyne, Founders of Old Testament Criticism (London: Methuen and Co., 1893), p.225.

[3] The Thinker, vol. IV (1893), p.280.

W. R. Nicoll, and Andrew Harper of Sydney, not to mention George Adam Smith with whom, along with Robertson Smith, Davidson made up "that great Scottish triad." Whitehouse referred to him as "a teacher of a new race of theologians."[4]

Not all credits were given in honour, of course. John McLeod in his Scottish Theology tells of the time when Davidson was still assistant to John Duncan and the "Rabbi" recognised that his junior colleague was showing signs of "going off on rationalistic lines." Duncan called in George Smeaton, Professor of New Testament at New College, to do what he could to reclaim Davidson. But, says McLeod:

> The best meant efforts were in vain; and Davidson's teaching, and even more than his positive teaching, his hints and suggestions, became the source of an alien infusion in Old Testament studies in Scotland. Robertson Smith caught the infection and spread the plague.[5]

McLeod says that Davidson's rationalism began "only cautiously or tentatively", and in his remarks overall he has, unwittingly, suggested nearly all the aspects of "the riddle of A. B. D." - what was the extent of his "rationalism", indeed of his criticism?, how did he effect, almost single-handedly, as he is credited with doing, the revolution in biblical studies in Scotland?, what, exactly were his critical views?, and as interesting if not as important, what light is thrown on these questions by his controversial silence throughout the trial of his most famous pupil? Indeed, why was Davidson himself not convicted of heresy either before, at the same time as, or even after Smith?

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[4] Ibid., p.281.

[5] John McLeod, Scottish Theology (Edinburgh: The Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1943), p.288.

There are any number of possible answers to the last question, not the least of which is that prior to Robertson Smith's somewhat dramatic entry onto the stage, the Free Church had other things to think about, or that prior to the mid-seventies the full impact of critical attitudes to the Bible had been little felt anywhere in Britain. In any case Cheyne claims that it was not until 1881, after Robertson Smith had broken the ice and the battle for the Bible was in effect over, that Davidson, with his article "Job" in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, gave any help to critical students at large. It was, Cheyne claims, Davidson's first work of a genuinely critical nature.[6] Cheyne's assessment is open to question of course. Nonetheless A. B. Davidson is generally acknowledged to be the father of criticism in Scotland, although he was never really prosecuted, while others, not alone Robertson Smith, were.[7]

The Case

There was, however, an A. B. Davidson case of sorts, preceded by unofficial rumblings. Both were occasioned by the Smith Case. In 1878, in an appendix to his pamphlet "Professor Smith and His Apologists", John Montgomery took Davidson to task for his article "Apocrypha" in the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Montgomery began by remarking that "there are those who say that Professor Davidson is the leader of that new school of Biblical Criticism which has recently arisen in the Free Church of Scotland, and of which Professor Smith of Aberdeen is a more prominent and perhaps a more advanced member; . . ." He went on to say that if Smith differed at all from his former teacher it was only

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[6]Cheyne, Founders, p.226.

[7]Notably Marcus Dods and A. B. Bruce in 1890 and of course George Adam Smith in 1902.

in the extent to which Smith carried the application of critical principles.[8] Davidson therefore was not less culpable than Smith - this was Montgomery's main line of argument. But he accused Davidson on the basis of the article itself. Davidson, he said, had fairly blurred the Confession's distinction between inspired and uninspired writings, giving the canonical books only a higher rank than the Apocryphal,[9] and was irreverent in referring to Chronicles as a "mere compilation."[10] And to Davidson's comment that "many have discovered traces of Persian ideas even in the canonical books of the Old Testament, particularly in the doctrine of angels in the later books, but the trustworthiness of such discoveries may be fairly questioned", Montgomery replied,

> "May be fairly questioned!" This is all that a theological Professor of the Free Church of Scotland has to say against a notion manifestly subversive of belief in the plenary inspiration of some, at least, of the books of the Old Testament, a notion in favour chiefly amongst the most dangerous enemies of genuine Christianity! If there is such a thing as damning with faint praise, there may be such a thing also as commending by faint censure.[11]

Montgomery also cited Davidson's discussion of angels and Wisdom and ended by hinting that Davidson, no less than Smith, and for the same reasons, should be removed from his place of influence.[12]

One of the more interesting aspects of this particular episode is that by 1898 Davidson seems to have changed his mind about Apocryphal

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[8] John Montgomery, "Professor Smith and His Apologists" (Edinburgh: James Gemmell, 1878), p.55.

[9] Ibid., p.56.

[10] Ibid., p.58.

[11] Ibid., p.59. The quotation from Davidson is from Encyclopaedia Britannica, ninth edition, vol. II, p.182.

[12] John Montgomery, "Professor Smith and His Apologists", p.61.

advances over the Old Testament, at least with regard to angels. In Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible he wrote that "There is little advance over Daniel in the angelology of the Apocrypha."[13] Montgomery, however, was in no mood to wait twenty years for a reassessment on Davidson's part. In any case, nothing ever came of his exposé.

An attempt to begin a formal process against Davidson was actually made, however, in the Glasgow and Edinburgh Presbyteries late in 1879. The focus of the complaint was an article Davidson had written for The British and Foreign Evangelical Review at the request of its editor James Candlish. The Robertson Smith case was at the height of its intensity and Candlish had been offered a lecture from a Dr. Murphy of Belfast on Deuteronomy which dealt with the subject from a point of view opposed to Smith's. Candlish wrote to Davidson that he did not think he could refuse an article "on that side" without exposing himself to the charge of partiality. "At any rate, if I declined that, I could hardly admit one on the other side, and to shirk all discussion of the subject would, I think, be a weak and unworthy policy."[14] Candlish was asking Davidson for something from "the Smith side" then; and on those terms Davidson gave him "Review of Works on Old Testament Exegesis in 1878" for the April number. Carnegie Simpson, later, considered it a non-committal article.[15] At the time, however, others

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[13] "Angel", Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. I. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1898), p.97

[14] James Strahan, Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.205ff. Dr. Murphy's article did not appear by the way.

[15] Simpson, The Life of Principal Rainy, vol. I, p.354.

thought differently. Attention was drawn to it at the Commission's meeting in November. It was debated in the Glasgow Presbytery but a motion to impeach Candlish for his responsibility in the matter was defeated, as was the appeal to the Synod.[16]

The case that actually did reach the General Assembly began on 5th November 1879 when, on a motion by Mr. Macaulay, the Edinburgh Presbytery resolved to meet in conference (i.e. "alone") anent theological teaching within the Free Church generally, "and in New College." This it did at its next meeting on 26th November. At that meeting the Conference resolved to continue its discussion at the following meeting, that of 31st December, where John McEwan gave notice of his intention to move a motion. At the Presbytery's meeting of 28th January 1880 it was decided to have a special session on 11th February to dispose of McEwan's motion and an overture proposed by Dr. Moody Stuart to the effect that the General Assembly appoint a special commission "to inquire into the state of theological training within the Colleges of the Church, and into the published writings of the Professors, . . ." At this special session, on a vote of 26 for and 36 against, the Presbytery decided not to transmit Stuart's overture to the General Assembly. It was also decided to consider McEwan's motion at the next ordinary meeting, that of 25th February. At the meeting of 25th February McEwan moved that:

> The attention of the Presbytery having been directed to certain views of Prof. Davidson, and more particularly to statements made by him in respect to Pentateuchal history, law, and prophecy, published in the 'British and Foreign Evangelical Review' of April 1879, in an Article entitled 'Review of Works on O. T. Exegesis, 1878' - appoint a Committee to examine the said Article,

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[16] Black and Chrystal, The Life of William Robertson Smith, pp.338-339.

> with power, if they shall see cause, to confer with Prof. Davidson, and to report.[17]

Davidson's article is significant in any study of his ideas, and the canny McEwan, whose astute observations in connection with the Robertson Smith case have already been cited, gets full marks for again having at least done his homework. His motion was defeated however by that, interestingly, of Sir Henry Moncrieff: "The Presb., considering that it may be open to members individually to obtain explanations from Prof. Davidson, by private and friendly communications, decline 'in hoc statu' to take Presbyterial action in the matter." McEwan and several others appealed and at its meeting of 27th April, 1880, the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, by a vote of nine votes to three, affirmed the decision of the Presbytery.[18] Again McEwan asked leave to appeal.

The General Assembly heard the case on 29th May. McEwan opened the debate by saying that it was not true that the appellants were simply opposed to every scientific inquiry into Scripture. "On the contrary they hailed every effort to shed fresh light on every page of that blessed book with thankfulness." But he went on to hit at the very heart of that for which Davidson was forever either praised or blamed. The appellants, said McEwan, objected to a style of criticism which substituted vague unproved hypotheses for solid evidence, and they refused to accept plausible probabilities in the place of well-authenticated realities.

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[17] Minutes of the Free Presbytery of Edinburgh, CH3/111/30, Scottish Records Office, Edinburgh. It is perhaps of some interest to note that during the half-session April to November, 1879, Davidson was Moderator of the Edinburgh Presbytery, although he was absent several times from the chair.

[18] Minutes of the Free Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, CH3/223/2, Scottish Records Office, Edinburgh.

> More particularly he found fault with men who had no hesitation in publishing sketches of critical opinion, indicating sympathy with them, and then immediately ask - "But is such and such an opinion true?" and instead of answering yes or no, going on to tell them - "This is a question of enormous complexity" - and that an estimate of it cannot be formed in a moment. The appellants protested against this style of criticism and held that men were not entitled to disturb the Church of Christ by publishing theories, the truth of which they had not verified, and the results of which they would neither justify nor condemn.[19]

Thus Davidson was attacked for precisely the thing he was normally given credit for, namely, never rejecting or accepting any theory without just reasons for doing so. Here, as it occasionally was throughout his life, his judiciousness was interpreted as reticence or even cowardice.

Principal Rainy then rose to defend the Presbytery's majority. He argued that as the case of Professor Smith was still in process, the Church was obliged not to entangle itself in another. No one would deny, he admitted after a protest from McEwan, that Davidson's article was written by a man who had the current discussions in view, although the article nowhere referred explicitly to the Smith case. And then in language which (in the record of his speech anyway) is frustratingly elusive, if not unintelligible altogether, he said that "the general tenor and course" of Davidson's article was "that it was not intended to produce the impression that there were grave grounds for the Church pausing and thinking well before it came to a final conclusion on that subject." He concluded, just as cryptically, by claiming that if that was the general tenor of the article, "then many members felt this, that Professor Smith's case forced upon the

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[19] Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of The Free Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, Hanson and Co., 1880), pp.278-279.

Church a great deal of thought and discussion with regard to very weighty questions."[20]

What Rainy seems to have meant was that if Davidson did not feel it necessary to have as his primary obligation in the article to ask the Church to ponder the "grave issues" before it, but rather felt free simply to go on doing what he believed was right before God, namely pursue his critical scholarship - well then there were weighty questions to be considered; that is, the Church should pause long before it condemned a man for doing what men of the calibre of Smith and Davidson were doing. Whatever Rainy's precise meaning, he was not for impeaching Davidson and he carried the day. After some bickering and shouting the motion to reverse the Presbytery's and the Synod's decision was defeated (151 votes to 41) by a motion to affirm it. Twice again, at the meetings of 30th September and 29th December, 1880, McEwan gave notice that he would call the attention of the Presbytery to his motion in regard to Professor Davidson, but at the meeting of 26th January, 1881, "after some explanation", he withdrew his motion. So ended, as undramatically as it had begun, the short-lived attempt to do something about the founder of biblical criticism in Scotland.

Biography

Andrew Bruce Davidson, like William Robertson Smith, was born in Aberdeenshire - in Ellon, not far from Smith's birthplace, in fact - on April 25th, 1831. Thus Davidson was another product of "that naked shoulder which our island thrusts into the cold North Sea" (as Taylor Innes

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[20] Ibid., pp.279-280.

called it), famous for its scholars and scholarship and its almost uniquely effective employment of Knox's Ladder, whereby "'the lad o'pairts' . . . shall pass from stage to stage as far as his academic abilities carry him, and shall reach the university without the consciousness of any rupture with his past, or of any transition from one social scale to another, least of all with any sense of having passed into a select or privileged circle."[21]

He was the youngest of four sons and two daughters. The father, Andrew the elder, was a crofter who came to farming after an accident in the lime quarry which he had for some years rented and worked. The mother, Helen Bruce, was undoubtedly the forming influence of A. B.'s life. Andrew was her favourite, and the story of her self-sacrificing devotion for the sake of his education does not lack the elements of high drama. It was she, against his father, who insisted that Andrew be educated.[22] After early training at what Innes describes as a "hedge-school" (because the student sometimes might have to get his tuition while out cutting corn with his master) and more regular

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[21] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.1ff. After citing some illuminating statistics in support, Strahan claimed that at the turn of the century "Education may accordingly be regarded as the most distinctive of the industries of Aberdeen, and the yearly output of disciplined minds as the most important of its products" (p.3). Later he added: "It is Scotland's distinction among the nations of the earth that, defying fate, she discovers, cherishes, and perfects the genius of her sons" (p.27). Strahan's remains, incidently, the only full-length biography of Davidson. It is supplemented by Taylor Innes' biographical introduction to Davidson's sermons, The Called of God, edited by J. A. Paterson, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), which itself contains references to biographical notices (pp.50-51), and S. R. Driver's short article in the Dictionary of National Biography (2nd supplement, volume I). George Adam Smith's piece in The Biblical World is the longest and most insightful of many tributes, and is as good certainly, in its own way, as Innes's often-cited essay.

[22] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.18.

instruction under Mr. Hay of Tillydesk, Andrew was sent, in the Spring of 1845, to the Grammar School of Aberdeen for six months under the famous Dr. Melvin.[23] There he was licked into shape for the university, or at least for a chance to compete in the examination for a bursary. He won the bursary and in the Autumn entered Marischal College. After four years of an honourable but not distinguished career - "on the average perhaps fourth", says Innes of Davidson's standing throughout his time at Marischal - he took the position of teacher of the Free Church School in Ellon, recently created out of the need for the Disruption Church to provide for its own system of education. As he had found Euclid "extremely dry" and had not won the mathematics prize for which he had competed, he threw himself into the study of languages: "Besides Hebrew, he taught himself in Ellon, French, German, Dutch, Italian and apparently Spanish; and these, with the classic tongues already acquired, gave scope as well as stimulus to his power of philological and philosophical research."[24]

Davidson's had been a godly home and under its influence he had resolved to enter the Divinity Hall, either in Aberdeen or Edinburgh. But his decision to postpone his theological training, compounded by his decision to pursue the study of languages, made his three and a half years of school mastering, not a step back (as it apparently was considered by some, including his mother) but a step aside: "Those very years, it has been shrewdly surmised, were 'the years in which he made himself'."[25]

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[23] The Called of God, p.12. Strahan, Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.24ff, has an excellent sketch of Melvin.

[24] The Called of God, p.20.

[25] Ibid., p.19.

As Davidson was only eighteen when he graduated with Mathematical honours from Marischal, he was but twenty-one when he entered New College in October 1852, just six years after its foundation stone had been laid by Thomas Chalmers. As a student in Edinburgh, Davidson, unlike Robertson Smith after him, was not well known or widely influential. He was "strongly evangelical" as Principal Donaldson (later Sir James Donaldson) of St. Andrews recalled, but with "a strange power of seeing both sides of a question with great intensity in periods immediately succeeding each other."

> We could play on this feature of his character. We could rouse him to the warmest defense of the strictest orthodoxy, and a short time after he would be equally decided in behalf of freedom of thought, if we abused Schleiermacher or other Germans.[26]

Early in his career then there was evidence of what might be called "the essential Davidson", fair, tolerant, perceptive - or alternatively, reticent, indecisive, sceptical. Whatever it is called the quality no doubt served him well, for New College in those days was apparently a place of restlessness, of tension between old and new, days when "the Free Church was on the edge of a precipice."[27] These were of course the premonitions of graver and larger things to come, things in which Davidson was to play so central a role.

At New College Rabbi Duncan was a profound influence on Davidson. The two were good friends; and although teaching Hebrew was not Duncan's strength, Davidson learned from him.

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[26] Ibid., p.27.

[27] Strahan, Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.28ff, describes the situation at New College in the fifties.

> Even on the linguistic side, Davidson could profit by the old teacher's knowledge as none of the other men did, for while he was perfectly familiar with the modicum of grammar and syntax that was taught in the classroom, he had only to get his master alone and state any difficulty, in order to obtain from him all the information that he wanted.[28]

Following his graduation from New College in the Spring or Summer of 1856, Davidson applied for and received a license to preach.[29] But although in his two years as probationer, he was a missioner and an assistant and preached at least once as a candidate, he never received a call. In 1858 his Church appointed him tutor in Hebrew at New College, assistant to Duncan. During the long vacations he went one year to Göttingen to work under Ewald and another to Syria to study Arabic.[30] And although Principal Cunningham had impressed upon him at his coming that he was not to lecture - he was only to teach Hebrew to the first class - there is evidence that in his four years as tutor he had clearly demonstrated his critical and exegetical powers. In 1862 he published the first part of his never-finished Commentary on Job, "the first really scientific commentary on the Old Testament in the English language."[31] In the Spring of the following year he was nominated to succeed Professor Duncan, and with the support of Duncan himself was unanimously appointed by the General Assembly. At New College he remained for the rest of his life.

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[28] Ibid., p.63.

[29] The Called of God, p.22. Strahan, Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.72, is even less precise than Innes on the date of Davidson's licensing.

[30] The Called of God, p.23. Again the dates are nowhere given and Strahan (Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.66) implies that the trip to the Continent came while Davidson was still a divinity student and does not mention a trip to the East until the end of his first session(year?) as Duncan's successor in the Chair (pp.97ff).

[31] The Called of God, pp.23-24; also Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.89.

The thirty-nine years between Davidson's appointment to the Chair in 1863 and his death in 1902 were full of a variety of academic work. It was not, however, an otherwise varied or exciting life. Besides the teaching to which he gave himself and in which he had no equal, he kept going from about the mid-seventies a constant flow of articles and reviews. The Expositor got the greatest percentage of the articles and The Expository Times a large selection of articles and reviews, while The Critical Review (originally The Theological Review and Free Church College Quarterly) took only, and most of the best, reviews. He wrote for the Encyclopaedia Britannica, Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible, Chambers's Encyclopaedia, and one or two other lesser known works. Except for his three texts on Hebrew language - Outlines of Hebrew Accentuation (1861), Introductory Hebrew Grammar (1874) and Hebrew Syntax (1894) - and his short primer, The Exile and the Restoration (1897), Davidson's main works are commentaries. The Theology of the Old Testament and Old Testament Prophecy are his lectures on those subjects and were edited after his death, as were the two volumes of sermons, The Called of God and Waiting Upon God, and one volume of Biblical and Literary Essays.[32] Between 1870 and 1884 he was an influential member of the Old Testament Committee for the Revised Version. He received honorary degrees from Aberdeen (LL.D.), Edinburgh and Glasgow (D.D.) and Cambridge (Litt.D.). In recognition of his lifetime of work in her behalf he was nominated to the Moderator-ship of his Church's General Assembly for the year 1897. He accepted,

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[32] A fairly complete annotated bibliography, compiled by Davidson's biographer James Strahan, was published in "The Writings of the Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Expository Times, vol. XV (October 1903-September 1904), pp.450-455.

but after consultation with his doctor, declined.[33] Such honours were the extent of his worldly fame, although it was said that at New College "the Hebrew Professor was the cause of more idolatry than the Kings of Israel."[34] He died suddenly of a heart attack on Sunday morning, 26th January, 1902, aged 70, and was buried, in company with Chalmers, Cunningham and Duncan, in Edinburgh's Grange Cemetary.[35]

If Davidson's life was not exciting in the usual sense, neither was it common in the usual sense. He was an extraordinarily solitary man - aloof and elusive are the words most often used of him. Though he exercised an almost magical influence over the students whom he loved and who loved him, there was behind his humility and kindness "a loneliness and seclusion of spirit which while it fascinates, defies penetration. 'A fugitive and gracious light . . . shy to illumine', he attracted only to escape."[36]

As often mentioned in the notices is his sense of humour. It was legendary, worth, in his biographer's estimation, nearly a chapter of classroom anecdotes - "these easy, unpremeditated, unexpected, never-repeated odds and ends of humour", as George Adam Smith called them.[37] The humour, however, is always described as wit, used with "fine reserve and rare aptness" but often "caustic and pitiless."[38]

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[33] Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.299ff.

[34] Ibid., p.311.

[35] Strangely, Strahan, Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.323-324, gives the date of his death as 24th February, and Driver, in the DNB, as 20th January. The Scotsman for 27th January has a tribute.

[36] George Adam Smith, "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 3, p.167.

[37] George Adam Smith, "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 4, p.294. See Andrew Bruce Davidson, chapter XI, for some amusing stories.

[38] George Adam Smith, "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 4, p.294.

Smith's comments are seconded everywhere.

Apparently there was little resentment at Davidson's devastating criticism, however, so complete was his possession of student minds and hearts. But the reiterated description of his humour as wit and sarcasm forces the question whether Davidson ever really laughed. There is the impression of melancholy, although the word is seldom applied to Davidson, as it is for instance to "Rabbi" Duncan. Still there are indications enough that his life was lonely, sometimes fearful, in ways profoundly pathetic.[39]

Davidson never married; he had considered matrimony, but two broken alliances and a third, a "sweet and ardent affection" for a girl still in her teens, when he was past fifty, left him to his death alone.[40]

The tones of Davidson's life seem to have been mostly somber, but they were not un-illuminated by shafts or patches of light and colour. If he was solitary, he was not odd, if elusive, not reclusive. He was "first and foremost a child of Nature", Strahan says, "as happy as any of his students when the last lectures of the session were delivered and the exit examinations were over."[41] He travelled widely on holidays and advised others to do the same, believing in the educative value of going abroad.[42] Nor were his intellectual tastes restricted. Poetry and novels provided an escape from "the

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[39] Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.230-231; The Called of God, pp.43ff.

[40] The accounts are sympathetically rendered in Andrew Bruce Davidson, chapter XIV.

[41] Ibid., pp.253-254.

[42] Ibid., pp.255f.

pursuit of the thousand and one tracks of illusive light, which ingenious speculation has thought open through the thickets of Pentateuchal and Prophetic problems."[43] He was, then, "well-rounded" or "normal", to deal in the debased currency of our own day, but only in the very limited sense in which such language can be used of an exceptionally gifted and exceptionally good man.

Davidson's greatness, by every account, lay in his teaching. His power as a teacher, George Adam Smith said, was "the bed-rock on which all the rest of his great reputation was founded."[44] Innes called Davidson "a born grammarian and teacher" and (quoting Alexander Yule, a lifelong friend of Davidson's) says he possessed the two great characteristics of his own teacher Melvin - "extreme accuracy, and the power of making his pupils think his own subject of vast importance."[45] The evidence is that the study of Hebrew and the Old Testament under Davidson became one of the most popular courses in the New College curriculum, and one of the experiences longest remembered. Testimonies tell of "the masterful grip" he gained over his students, his "commanding influence", and "that rare faculty, possessed by one or two in a generation, of opening up a new world of thought, in things that seemed trite and commonplace, to young and enquiring minds."[46] Of Davidson's power to influence, Professor (later Principal) Martin said: "There was witchery in it all."[47]

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[43] S. D. F. Salmond, "A. B. Davidson, D.D., LL.D.", The Expository Times, vol. VIII (October 1896-September 1897), p.441.

[44] George Adam Smith, "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 4, p.288.

[45] The Called of God, p.20. See also Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.64.

[46] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.97.

[47] The Scotsman for 3rd February, 1902.

Davidson's unrivalled superiority as a teacher is nowhere questioned and everywhere acknowledged. The secret of his success is more difficult to pinpoint. He was a scholar of the very first rank, but Strahan's comment that "one scarcely ever thought of him as learned in the special sense of the word - as erudite", is perceptive.[48] It confirms the impression got from reading even his most scholarly work. William Robertson Smith was a genius. It is not the word one wants for Davidson. Perhaps it was his disciplina, "neither oracular, nor scholastic; it might be called Socratic or Cartesian; but above all, it was Prophetic and Christian."[49] Perhaps it was his gentle persuasion: he never imposed himself or his opinions on his students, but allowed them, rather caused them and helped them to work out their own intellectual salvation, as he himself had had to do. Perhaps most of all it was the profoundly religious quality of all that he taught, wherein lecture and sermon, teaching and preaching were not two things but one and even in the study of Hebrew, "When his temples flushed, and his thin voice rose into a kind of scream, and his stiffened fingers moved swiftly through the pages, the class could not take notes: every man sat staring; and it was with much ado that one kept back the tears."[50]

Stalker in fact, in what is the best of all the tributes to Davidson in this memorial edition of The British Weekly, maintains that "What we have lost in Professor Davidson is a great orator." He was

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[48] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.127. Principal Martin referred to him as a genius, but it was in connection with his gifts as a teacher. The Scotsman for 3rd February, 1902.

[49] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.131.

[50] The British Weekly, 30th January, 1902, p.421.

not an orator of the "accepted type", like Gladstone, "who, along the channel of clear and melodious utterance, pours the resources of a rich and enthusiastic nature, giving the multitude back in a flood what he has received from them in drops." Rather, like Henry Drummond - "No man I have ever heard was a more successful orator, in the sense in which I am using the word, than Professor Drummond: . . ." - Davidson's style was sui generis.[51] Maybe here then, in the gift of imparting knowledge, and at the same time insight into spiritual realities, is the source of Davidson's greatness.

But even Stalker is not sure that the power of speaking, as such, is the key: "It was, in short, the man himself, imparted in his speech, that made the impression." Elmslie has summed up what all the commentators are getting at. Davidson's vast influence did not consist either in the matter or manner of his teaching, nor in any single element of his character.

> His singular and significant influence does not consist in what he does, but in what he is. It is not the quantity or the contents, but the quality and the kind of the thinking. It is not even the thought so much as the mind that secretes it. It is not its clearness nor its profundity, not its reserve nor its passion, not its scepticism nor its intensity of spiritual faith; but it is the combination of all these, and the strange, subtle, and fascinating outcome of them. The central and sovereign spring of Dr. Davidson's unique influence in the literature, scholarship, and ministry of the Church is his personality.[52]

Davidson was true to himself. In this he was the finest embodiment of his own counsel. In what Strahan says is one of the best things he ever wrote, a never-published address "modestly entitled 'Remarks on Preaching'", given to the New College Missionary Society in February 1888, Davidson said:

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

> Originality is just personality. Every man is original who is personal and not conventional. If one really thinks and feels, and does not merely repeat forms of expression by memory, his thoughts will be felt to be unlike those of any one else; men will discover themselves in contact with a living soul and mind, and will be constrained to listen . . . .[53]

It is better in trivial matters to be wrong, he said elsewhere, if our opinion be the fruit of the free and joyful activity of our own mind, than to be right, if the opinion we hold be one painfully dinned into us by some rigid disciplinarian.[54] He was not speaking here, however, of the dogmatists of his own church. On the contrary.

> Beware of allowing your Christian individuality to be squeezed out of you by the pressure of general opinion calling itself culture and liberality. You fear to be priest-ridden. I will warn you whom to fear - fear those intolerant bigots who lay claim to be illuminated and would crush out by their scorn every peculiarity of Christian character and sentiment.[55]

It was Davidson himself, honest before God and men, that constituted his Christian greatness and uniqueness.

The Problem Of A. B. D.

For all of his unquestioned greatness there is something frustrating about Davidson. It is not simply that he was himself elusive. It is that his views are elusive. It is as difficult to say what he thought as it is to say what he was. In this he is the exact opposite of William Robertson Smith. Whereas Smith had opinions on nearly everything, Davidson seems to have had very few. He is as immune to defence as he is to attack. Often all that can be done is to defend his silence. The biography is the best illustration. In writing the life of his master, Strahan had at least two purposes

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[53] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.186.

[54] Ibid., p.245.

[55] Ibid.

in mind.[56] The first was to defend Davidson against the charge that his role in the Robertson Smith case was in any way less than honourable. The second was to argue that Davidson's opinions had changed over the years, that Davidson had gradually accepted more and more critical positions, and to say again how very badly Davidson's lectures had been edited, the primary evidence being precisely the failure of the editors to account for the development in his ideas: "The man who never changes his opinions has no opinions to change."[57] That Strahan felt the subject required a chapter is perhaps proof that there was doubt about the certainty and direction of Davidson's thought.

There is doubt. But Davidson's vagueness may be inseparable from his genius.

> Age enhanced, if possible, his lovableness, but did not diminish the features described as so paradoxical in his character. He remained to the end as solitary and as elusive . . . . Nor did he grow more fixed about the things he had always held in solution. In one of his reviews he seems

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[56]Besides that of giving what is a pleasant, at times poignant, but not very detailed and on some points not even correct account of Davidson's life. Drummond and Bulloch think it is an "exceptionally bad" biography, in part the reason why Davidson remains "silent, wistful, elusive"! The Church in Late Victorian Scotland, 1874-1900 (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1978), p.42.

[57]Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.200-201. Strahan was not altogether happy with The Theology of the Old Testament, edited by S. D. F. Salmond, but he reserved his harshest language for J. A. Paterson, Davidson's successor at New College and editor of Old Testament Prophecy. More than once in individual passages Strahan hit at Paterson's editing, and chapter XIII of Andrew Bruce Davidson might be read as not too much more than an attack on Paterson's ineptitude. It was not the first time Strahan had vented himself on the subject. The annotated bibliography of Davidson's writings which he contributed to The Expository Times for October 1903-September 1904 (vol. XV), provided him with an opportunity for an equally sharp blast at Paterson. Paterson defended himself in the same volume. In the next volume Strahan replied to Paterson and the duel apparently was ended until Strahan took it up in the biography some thirteen years later.

> to hint that, if a scholar does grow more certain in his opinions, he becomes less able to stimulate the mind of others.[58]

Davidson's gift was not to answer questions, but to see exactly what they were. That often meant recognising that they were much more subtle and complicated than either traditional or modern answers implied. It sometimes meant realising that as yet they could not be answered at all. Elmslie is absolutely correct when he says that "A lecture by Dr. Davidson or a passage from his writings furnishes an inimitable lesson in the art of intellectual analysis. It is like an anatomical demonstration by an expert dissector."[59] And as Elmslie points out, the results were wholly positive: Davidson's students were liberated and their feet set upon a rock.[60]

There is still the problem of what Davidson thought. One critical reviewer of The Theology of the Old Testament, after trying without success to get a hold of him, declared that "The extent to which the author adopts and lays at the basis of his work the current critical views is not quite easy to determine",[61] and concluded that "he occupies

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[58]George Adam Smith, "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 4, p.297. Smith cites The Theological Review and Free Church College Quarterly, vol. III, p.117 but it is an incorrect reference. It should be p.177, as Smith's (same) article in The Union Magazine (vol. II, 1902) indicates. Davidson's remarks came in a review of a new edition of Hermann Schultz's Alttestamentliche Theologie. Davidson was commenting on the way Schultz had simplified his conception of the growth of ideas in the Old Testament and his manner of presenting its theology. Davidson concluded: "The author's new edition certainly reads more smoothly than former editions, and is perhaps clearer; but it seems to have partly lost its stimulating effect upon the mind."

[59]The British Weekly, 30th January, 1902, p.419.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Geerhardus Vos, The Princeton Theological Review, vol. IV (1906), p.118.

an intermediate position, which, in our opinion, does justice to neither the old nor the modern view and is, in its continual oscillation between the two, weaker than either of them."[62]

There is another problem in dealing with Davidson. The same reviewer noticed that "Evidently . . . Dr. Davidson was a thorough believer in the pedagogic efficacy of repetition." His point was that some of the repetition could have been edited out, but admitted that "even this feature of the book helps to increase its individual character."[63] Again the defect is the defect of a virtue. Its result however is to bring the reader back to a limited number of general themes, such as the necessity of reading the Old Testament in terms of both its historical context and its New Testament interpretation; or of keeping always in mind the progressive and non-dogmatic character of revelation. Thus, for instance, the discussion of prophecy, in almost any of its aspects, is really a discussion of those themes. The opposite it turns out is true as well: an analysis of Davidson's view of the developmental character of biblical revelation is more often than not a discussion of the fulfilment of prophecy. But prophecy was Davidson's favourite study. Of it he was an acknowledged master and on it he wrote more than on any other single topic. It is not surprising therefore that more than one subject is discussed in terms of it. But the effect of this tends to be an impression of vagueness compounded by repetition. Often as not it is the uncertainty itself that is repeated. Of course it is not enough to say what the general impression is. It must be substantiated. Nor is it as simple as that.

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[62] Ibid., p.116.

[63] Ibid., p.119. Salmond, the editor of The Theology of the Old Testament, remarked on the same thing, p. vi.

Davidson did have definite views on many things, and when he spoke he displayed a shrewdness and insight that whets the appetite for more. Moreover he lived in a period of almost unparalleled religious uncertainty, which must have made a dogmatic assertion of any kind seem extremely risky and unwise. On the whole, however, one feels that somehow it is required to say a good deal in order to show that Davidson did not.

From one point of view just about the whole of A. B. D. could be discussed in terms of the two or three issues in which Strahan seemed especially interested, Davidson's role in the Robertson Smith case, Davidson's critical development, and the editing of Old Testament Prophecy. As the last of these is in itself of relatively minor significance, it is left to a note, although in the nature of the case it also contributes something to the question of Davidson's critical development and to his views of prophecy.

The other two issues are more important. They bear on Davidson's religious and intellectual character and in that way on the relationship of his faith to his criticism. And as an analysis of Davidson's views seems inevitably to be bound up with Davidson the man (more it appears than with either of the Smiths), a consideration of his views would be incomplete without a consideration of either or both of them. For overall it is Davidson's vagueness on so many things that seems to crowd out every other impression of him. Or it is his silence, which in the trial of Robertson Smith, had obvious moral overtones. There is no question about Davidson's faith. But to what extent was he a critic? Not that he was a traditionalist. He was not. But he criticised criticism as well, not only certain critics and critical opinions, but the whole critical enterprise. Was he then the founder

of criticism in Scotland? In what sense? A. B. Bruce's comment is worth considering: "Scotland must look elsewhere for its Luther. But in Davidson it has at least an Erasmus."[64]

There is too much testimony to Davidson's influence on both the hearts and minds of his students ever to question his Christian greatness as a teacher, or his religious genius. Still, it must be said that Bruce was right. Bruce's reference was to Davidson's role in the critical movement, but his remark has a wider application. Davidson might have said more and been more specific on any number of topics, even if it was why he did not say more and was not more specific. We are poorer because he did not and was not. The very difficult issues of his critical development and his role in the Robertson Smith case, however, must be preceded by an assessment of his views of Scripture, of faith and of criticism and the relationship between the two, as well as his tenuous connection with the older school to which his views were in part a reaction.

Davidson And "The Older School"

Amidst the more dogmatically discriminating of his brethren Davidson was, as Innes put it, "as neutral . . . as an iceberg; as free from the fetters and even the friction of their opinions as a globe of glass."[65] His relationship to the older school was uncertain. The best illustration of the point is perhaps his handling of Scripture. It is undeniably modern but at times it looks very traditional indeed.

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[64] A. B. Bruce, "The Rev. A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. VIII (October, 1896), p.264.

[65] The British Weekly, 30th January, 1902. This notice originally appeared in the same journal for 19th August, 1887 and was said to be considered by Davidson "the best characterisation of him that he had ever seen."

The suspicion with which he was regarded in some circles, however, precludes the notion that his orthodoxy was never in doubt. And although no one formally said so, it is likely that more than his concept of inspiration was in question. Before attempting to assess his relationship to traditionalism in terms of his biblical method, therefore, it is in order briefly to look at his views of the cardinal doctrines of the faith. It will be seen that however unorthodox his critical position was thought to be, on the central issues, Davidson was as little a heretic as any man of his generation, critic or otherwise.

a. Doctrinal Orthodoxy

For a start, Davidson was a thorough-going supernaturalist. He had no truck with views that deny at the outset that miracles can happen. Claims that God cannot perform a miracle or that nature is such that a miracle cannot be performed or that God and nature are both such that a miracle need not be performed - "to make any of these affirmations would surely be very arrogant."[66] He was even less a "mythology-man" of the modern sort: I Corinthians 15, he maintained, was written precisely to refute the notion that the Resurrection was simply spiritual.[67] And on the specific questions

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[66] A. B. Davidson, Old Testament Prophecy, edited by J. A. Paterson, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1903), p.150. Davidson did, however, make a distinction between the days of Christ upon the earth, when "there was granted to faith a power even over the material world, and there was perhaps no physical limit to what faith might do", and our own age, "when miracle is withdrawn", and "these physical powers do not come within the scope of faith; . . ." Waiting Upon God (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1905), p.242. But such a distinction does not militate against his belief in the miracles of the Bible, or at least in the possibility of them; rather it supports it.

[67] A. B. Davidson, The Theology of the Old Testament, edited by S. D. F. Salmond (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1904), p.518.

of the Resurrection and Virgin Birth of Christ:

> We . . . believe in the resurrection of our Lord, because there is historical evidence for it; . . . And in like manner we believe in the birth of our Lord from a virgin, because a historian narrates it, who declares that he had perfect knowledge of all things from the first.[68]

On the Atonement there was reason to take a second look at the views of both George Adam Smith and William Robertson Smith. In the case of the former it was claimed by his opponents that his critical views had brought that doctrine into question; in the case of the latter, his conspicuous silence on the sacrifice of Christ poses a problem even for modern readers. What of Davidson?

Davidson wrote a commentary on Hebrews. There is therefore no requirement to cull his views on the death of Christ from remarks addressed principally to other themes. And on every score - on the relation of Christ's death to Old Testament sacrifice, on the nature and efficacy of the sacrifice itself - Davidson is remarkable for the most stringent orthodoxy. A few quotations will suffice to make the point. On Hebrews 10.5-10, the comparison of Old Testament sacrifice with that of Christ's, Davidson said that such was the ineffectiveness of the Law's sacrifices that it was not God's will that they should continue. God's will was another offering, even the Body of Christ.

> Even the Old Testament itself in the days of the legal sacrifices gave expression to this truth. The word of prophecy, predicting the coming of the Son into the world, and expressing His mind and intention in His incarnate state, represents Him as saying: Sacrifice and offering (such as are offered by the Law, ver. 8) Thou didst not will; a body didst Thou prepare me; and then as adding: Lo I am come to do Thy will, O God (vers. 6,7). These words of the Son, being the word of God in Scripture, set aside the sacrifices of the Law, and substitute that of the Son in their room (vers. 8,9). This will of God, the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all, has been accomplished,

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[68] Old Testament Prophecy, pp.358-359.

> and through it we havè been sanctified the people of a new covenant (ver. 10).[69]

On the same general theme, that treated in Hebrews 10.1-10, Davidson again made the point that in Old Testament times God contemplated a sacrifice which would be "the offering of Himself by the Son."[70]

As for the efficacy of Christ's self-offering, Davidson stressed that it does not lie simply in the mere fact that it was made in obedience to God's will. The language of the writer cannot be resolved in that way. "Its point is quite different. It argues that the Son's offering of Himself is the true and final offering for sin, because it is the sacrifice which, according to prophecy, God desired to be made."[71]

Finally, Christ's sacrifice in relation to that of the Day of Atonement:

> The two differ only as ways in which His offering may be viewed. But His one offering gathers up into itself both the sacrifice that inaugurates the covenant, and all the many sacrifices offered year by year to maintain it and to realise it; it reaches the idea which they strove towards in vain, and by reaching it for ever sets them aside.[72]

In all of this one can hardly but be reminded of the remarks on sacrifice made by Davidson's pupil George Adam Smith. How profoundly different are the views of the two men. Smith saw Christ's sacrifice

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[69] A. B. Davidson, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1882), p.191.

[70] Ibid., p.192.

[71] Ibid., p.194.

[72] Ibid., p.195. It must be added that besides the commentary on the text Davidson has provided a "Note on the Ministry of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement", which discusses amongst other things the difference in the point of view of the author of Hebrews from that of the other New Testament writers and several minor ways in which the author's analogies cannot be made to fit Old Testament practices (Ibid., pp.196ff.). There is also a useful "Note on the Words Purge, Sanctify, Make Perfect." (Ibid., pp.203ff.). Neither of these notes affect the substantial orthodoxy of Davidson's doctrine. In fact, they give it added support. See in particular, for instance, pp.198ff.

primarily in terms of self-giving and cited Jeremiah, who "by his example of service and suffering" was illustrating how the Old Testament had prepared men for the death of Christ. Davidson, on the contrary, held that between the view of sacrifice as self-dedication and that of substitution there is "a radical distinction."

> The first view, that of self-surrender or self-dedication, is an independent truth of religion, which no doubt finds its perfect realisation in Christianity, but is essential to every religion. The second idea, that of substitution, seems peculiar to Christianity, and the expression of it in sacrifice is not the symbolising of a general truth of religion as such, but of this particular religion; and in fact, the typical value of the sacrifice is strictly its only meaning. It predicts the substitutionary death of Christ.[73]

A good deal more could be quoted but perhaps one or two more citations may suffice to illustrate amongst other things how very seriously Davidson reckoned a right understanding of this particular issue to be. In 1888 A. B. Bruce, not a pupil but a contemporary at New College, had contributed an essay to The Expositor on the meaning of Hebrews 2.9.[74] Next year Davidson replied in the same journal with "'Crowned with Glory and Honour'." Bruces's view, he declared, is that "Christ was crowned by the Father with glory and honour in His earthly life. This honour and glory was just in a word His position as one appointed to die in behalf of others."[75] In other words Christ was crowned with glory and honour, not after His death and because of it, in Heaven, but before it, on earth. His honour was that of Moses and Aaron, "the glory of being the leader of the people out of Egypt into the promised land, that is, of being the 'Captain of Salvation'; . . ."[76] To this Davidson answered that this "fine idea" is "an idea altogether

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[73] Old Testament Prophecy, p.231. See also Ibid., pp.459-460 where Davidson almost perfectly describes Smith's notion of vicarious sacrifice and then refutes it.

[74] The Expositor, third series, vol. VIII (1888), p.359-379.

[75] The Expositor, third series, vol. IX (1889), p.115.

[76] The Expositor, third series, vol. VIII (1888), p.374-375.

out of harmony with the general tone of Scripture when referring to His sufferings and death."

> This theory speaks of Christ's appointment to die for men as a glory and grace conferred on Him; Scripture says, "God spared not His Son." The present epistle speaks of His enduring the cross, despising the "shame"; this theory speaks of God conferring glory upon Him by giving Him an "opportunity" of undergoing the shame. If this is not a "modern" idea, one would like to be told where to look for one. There is a multitude of passages which speak of the "grace of God" to us in appointing His Son to die, let one unequivocal one be produced which speaks of His "grace" to Christ in giving Him such an appointment. He was made a "curse" for us, being hanged upon a gibbet.[77]

A page later Davidson remarked that to throw Christ into the scale along with other moral beings, and to pass a general moral judgement on His giving Himself in death as the act of a moral being among other moral beings, no respect being had to His Person, is to take a position "to which Scripture has hardly yet advanced."[78]

There is more in The Expositor article as there is from time to time throughout both Prophets and Theology but the point has been made. Davidson could not be faulted on the Atonement. On that doctrine at least his alleged critical heterodoxy had absolutely no deleterious effects.

There is only one other doctrine which might even suggest itself as a candidate for dogmatic scrutiny. That is Davidson's doctrine of sin and the nature of man; and it suggests itself only because he frequently spoke in his sermons of the fundamental goodness of man. Innes noticed this in his introduction to The Called of God.[79] Men

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[77] The Expositor, third series, vol. IX, (1889) pp.115-116.

[78] Ibid., p.117. See The Epistle to the Hebrews, pp.57-59 for similar language.

[79] The Called of God, p.54.

have an "instinct for God", Davidson said, and are "sensitive to godliness."[80] Elsewhere he remarked that "the soul has a bent in the direction of truth; it loves it, longs for it, strives after it, is straitened till it find it."[81] Throughout Davidson's writings there are remarks, often incidental in nature, to the same effect.[82] But considered in the light of the fuller and more technically theological discussion in The Theology of the Old Testament (which pays very careful attention to both Old and New Testament texts on the subject), they would not constitute a matter for dogmatic confrontation.[83] The issue was never taken up, in any case, which suggests that there was no good reason for taking it up.

b. Biblical Method

While his views on the central doctrines, taken on their own, might indicate that Davidson was as much a traditionalist as anyone, his approach to Scripture would show that he had more than one side. Those who accused him of advocating higher critical views were not wrong, yet he bore a certain likeness to those from whom he differed most.

As early as 1862 Davidson wrote in the preface to his first Job: "The Books of Scripture, so far as interpretation and general formal criticism are concerned, must be handled very much as other books are handled." He affirmed his loyalty to Scripture – "We do not speak here of the feeling of reverence and solemnity with which we handle

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[80] Ibid., p.136.

[81] Literary and Biblical Essays, p.1. This essay contains quite a full statement of Davidson's thinking along this line.

[82] See for instance Old Testament Prophecy, pp.92-93, Waiting on God, p.100, The Called of God, p.241.

[83] See especially the summary of Davidson's discussion in The Theology of the Old Testament, pp.224ff.

these books, knowing them to be the Word of God, and bow under their meaning so soon as it is ascertained" - but as for the "intellectual treatment and examination of them during the process of ascertaining their meaning", that treatment, he reiterated, must be "mainly the same treatment which we give to other books."[84] Even before he had been appointed to the Chair, then, Davidson had set out the lines along which he intended to approach the Bible; and they marked his method throughout his career.

On other issues as well, Davidson saw himself as a non-traditionalist. Grammar precedes Dogmatic, he maintained, and not the other way around.

> Any exposition now to be valuable or even bearable must base itself immovably on Grammar. For Grammar is the foundation of Analysis, Analysis of Exegesis, Exegesis of Biblical Theology, and Biblical Theology of Dogmatic. We in this country have not been unaccustomed to begin at the other end, creating Exegesis and Grammar by deduction from Dogmatic instead of discovering Dogmatic by induction from Grammar.[85]

He did not intend to deprecate Theology, certainly not Biblical Theology, but simply to ensure that it was done from "the right end." Indeed he once said that criticism was legitimized precisely and only because it was, in his words, "a handmaid to Theology"; nonetheless "Criticism or Introduction must precede any attempt at a scientific Old Testament Theology."[86]

The fundamental difference between Davidson and those of the dogmatic school was a whole cast of mind, a completely different way of seeing the Bible. Where one saw a system of doctrine, the other

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[84] A. B. Davidson, A Commentary, Grammatical and Exegetical, on The Book of Job, vol. I (London: Williams and Norgare, 1862), p. ix.

[85] Ibid., pp. v, vi.

[86] The Theology of the Old Testament, p.5.

saw a rich and varied literature, and usually the two views were incompatible. As Davidson put it in regard to prophecy:

> Unless we realise the idealism of the prophets, and I may add, their poetry also, it is hopeless to seek to understand them. The greatest foe to the intelligence of the Old Testament is the prosaic mind - the mind that looks everywhere for bare, abstract dogma, and for definite predictions of the future, and is unable to perceive the bright colours of idealism and imagination in which Old Testament truth is set forth.[87]

Of the fact that the proverbialists and wise men of the Old Testament knew nothing of a Messiah (or for that matter seem never to have heard of the Kingdom of God, or even of Israel) he said:

> The Old Testament is the most unintelligible of books. It is like the sun, the more we look at it the blinder we grow. Side by side, in the same channel, we see currents of thought running of most diverse colours, refusing to coalesce, even appearing to us incapable of coalescence. Let us wait; they all run in the same direction, and will all find their way to the same sea.[88]

The contrast between Davidson's "mental set" and that of the older school is here nicely drawn. Davidson started with the literature in all its apparent unintelligibility and embraced it; whatever system or coalescence there was in it must be waited for. The coalescence was there all right (in Christ, as he said often enough, wherein all the Old Testament's incompatibilities, like all life's mysteries, are integrated) but it must not be got in a mechanical sort of way, such as by superimposing a dogmatic pattern upon the whole at the beginning and then pressing out inter-relationships which may be inherent in the pattern but not in the Old Testament itself. We must square Scripture with Scripture, but we must not force a reconciliation where one is

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[87] Old Testament Prophecy, pp.364-365.

[88] "Some Recent Books on Ecclesiastes", The Theological Review and Free Church College Quarterly, vol. iii (1888), p.14.

not possible. To do so is simply to show up the falsity of a systematic approach.

> I believe that no duty is so imperatively incumbent on the interpreter of the present day as that of bringing out fully the antinomies - the apparently irreconcilable propositions - in the Bible with regard both to God and man, and of refusing to subordinate or explain away anything, in order to give fuller swing and scope to something else. These opposite propositions in Scripture are usually also akin to opposite principles in the human mind and in Providence, and our moral nature often demands their full statement; and when, in a system, one is raised to predominance at the expense of depressing the other, we instinctively feel the falsehood of the system: and much of the revolt against religion and the Bible is, I think a revolt, not so much against them, were they rightly known, as against undue theological subordinating of one part of them to another.[89]

The quotation is from Davidson's inaugural lecture of 1863 and is a declaration of his commitment, from the beginning, to at least two things. The first was a scientific or inductive method which did not suppress or deny inconsistencies in Scripture in order to effect or vindicate a presupposed harmony. The second was the conviction that apparent contradiction or mystery in religion is proper and altogether to be expected. We cannot comprehend Truth or God in their systhesis, he said, only in their analysis; and if we are to have the truth, all the fragments must be accepted. The mind demands principles, but experience proves that falsehood is generated by carrying principles too far, especially in religion. He warned against reasoning on Scripture statements, "for logic in theology can effect anything." The "utter inapplicability" of logic in theology could be shown, he claimed, from this, that in religion we must frequently believe what, on admitted premises, we can logically disprove, and on the other hand, refuse to believe what, on admitted premises, we can logically prove.

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[89] A. B. Davidson, Biblical and Literary Essays, edited by J. A. Paterson (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1902), p.19.

"The mind is not a logic - truth streams into it through a thousand channels." And in an apt illustration he pointed out that it was no proof in religion that you were in the wrong way just because you could see a precipice before you; but you would be in the wrong way if you went over it.[90] Indeed the gaps in the system, or the fragments needing to be tidied up, are as important as that which "fits", because in dealings with God, things cannot always be expected to fit. "Reflect that even in the economy of Providence no principles are carried to their full application, but there is an equipoise of forces."[91]

Perhaps as compact a statement as Davidson ever made on these matters came in a discussion of a New Testament problem, in a review of a series of papers on "The Second Advent, will it be before the Millenium?" He was addressing himself to certain passages in Revelation and spoke of the necessity of keeping exegesis free from considerations of doctrine. "To mix up these dogmatic or rationalistic questions with the question of interpretation only confuses the real issue, which is, what is the natural meaning of this passage in the Apocalypse?"[92] Davidson's language is significant: exegesis and dogmatics are not to be "mixed up"; and notice too the equation of "dogmatic" with "rationalistic."

Some of this may have had to do with Davidson's temperament or personality, for he had, according to one who knew him early in his life, "the most delicate and poetic mind I ever met."[93] That is, his

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[90] Ibid., pp.19-20.

[91] Ibid., p.20.

[92] The Theological Review and Free Church College Quarterly, vol. II (1888), p.256.

[93] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.140.

inclinations may have been simply literary as opposed to philosophical. But this is only to draw attention to another facet of this essential difference between old and new, namely the difference in their respective conceptions of the nature of truth and therefore of the way in which it is perceived. As Andrew Harper recalled:

> It seemed to me then and always that Davidson trusted to his imaginative insight into the strength and weakness of the human spirit, and to his fundamental belief in the love of God, for guidance in his theological thinking, more than to anything that could be done for him by the purely intellectual action of the mind. He had lived with the Prophets and Psalmists too long to have the logician's suspicion of the imagination as a guide to truth.[94]

For all of his very substantial disagreements with them, however, Davidson "delighted to honour" the distinguished scholars in his own Church of the generation earlier than his own.[95] The reason may be that in some things there is a curious similarity between his and their use of Scripture. Nor is it alone in the reverence which he, like them, continually insisted on. There is something conspicuously biblical about Davidson's hermeneutic. It is "old-fashioned" - certainly by modern standards. But even in Robertson Smith there is not the quality here being alluded to. Davidson refused the Gifford Lectureship, for instance, on the grounds that the terms Gifford had laid down, as he understood them, excluded revealed religion; and, George Adam Smith tells us, "He would not interpret the religion of Israel except as revealed."[96] Davidson began and ended with the Bible. He never presumed to get beneath or beyond or behind it. His data were biblical. It is difficult to imagine him writing a Religion of

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[94] Ibid., pp.142-143.

[95] Old Testament Prophecy, p. vii.

[96] "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 4, p.292.

the Semites. But there is more to it than what after all might be regarded (compared to Robertson Smith for instance) as simply the limitations imposed by Davidson's talents or his dogged loyalty to a choice of life's work. Although he consistently maintained that the books of the Old Testament must be read "on their own" - on their own terms and in their own context and without, as it were, the interpretive hindsight of later revelation - he just as consistently urged that the Old Testament could never be understood fully apart from the New. Almost no other single theme is as prominent in Davidson, at least in his lectures, as this one of the necessity to see the Scriptures as a whole. Illustrations of the point abound. Perhaps the most obvious to cite would be Davidson's treatment of the book of Job to which he gave so much time and thought, and more particularly, within Job itself, the doctrine of immortality. To begin with, Davidson warned against assessing the book from a modern perspective:

> Such a creation as Job would be an anomaly in Christian drama. But nothing would be more false than to judge the poet's creation from our later point of view, according to a more developed sense of sin and a deeper reverence for God than belonged to antiquity.[97]

At the same time, on 19.25:

> The vision of his meeting God in peace so absorbed Job's mind, that the preliminaries which would occur to a mind in a calmer condition, and which immediately occur to us, were not present to his thoughts. Yet I do not know but that to Job's mind all the religious essentials were present which we associate with the future life. And though the ancient and traditional interpretation of the passage was in many respects exegetically false, and imposed on Job's mind our more particular conceptions, it seems to me that it seized the true elements of Job's situation in a manner truer to the reality than can be said of some modern expositions.[98]

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[97] The Theology of the Old Testament, p.475.

[98] Ibid., p.495.

This is evidence not so much perhaps of Davidson's appreciation of the relationship between Old and New Testament truth as it is of his appreciation of the relationship between the older and newer scholarship, of how the older writers could have been exegetically wrong, yet in some sense, precisely because of their exegesis, have grasped the truth of a passage better than those whose exegetical method was more advanced. Still it illustrates the point, that Old Testament truth is most completely understood in the light of the New Testament revelation. As he said regarding certain statements about life and immortality in the Old Testament: "What value to attribute to them is a thing that perhaps cannot be decided without bringing them into relation to the doctrine regarding future things now fully revealed in the New Testament."[99] No Old Testament truth can be understood except from a New Testament perspective; at the same time, no Old Testament book should be read from a New Testament point of view. "In treating the Old Testament scientifically, we show the materials of the fabric not yet reared; in treating it practically, we may even exhibit the fabric fully reared."[100] His use of Paul's argument in Galatians and Romans in partial explication of the Old Testament law is illustrative of the same general point; and is too but one example of many of Davidson's use of New Testament texts in support of his interpretation of Old Testament passages.[101] Even in his discussions of Old Testament theology "by itself" there is a certain conspicuousness in Davidson's use of proof-texts. Whatever his personal views may have been, he took very seriously his remit not to go beyond the biblical revelation or interpret Scripture on any basis other than

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[99] Ibid., p.439.

[100] Ibid., p.495.

[101] Ibid., p.454.

what Scripture itself actually said - in both testaments. Thus Davidson's kinship with his immediate predecessors.

The comparison between Davidson and the older school is revealed not only in his doctrinal orthodoxy but in what can only be called his conspicuously biblical method, his comparing of Scripture with Scripture, his frequent use of proof-texts, his commitment to the statements of the Bible alone, and to the interpretation of the Old Testament in the light of the New; the profounder contrast is revealed in his commitment first to a scientific or non-dogmatic approach to Scripture, and second, to a non-dogmatic conception of religious truth.

Davidson And Higher Criticism

Davidson seemed to run free of intellectual fashions, whether of the traditional or of the modern sort, never allowing himself to be forced into opinions or habits of thought by the academic and cultural pressures of the day. While it is certainly accurate to describe him as a "modern critic", it is never safe to take for granted what, exactly, his opinion on any given subject will be. Something has been said of the relationship between Davidson and the traditional orthodoxy of the New College of his student days. Consideration is now given to his view of modern criticism in general, and to some of the better known critics in particular.

a. Criticism In General

In his chapter on "The Isaianic Problem" (XV) in Old Testament Prophecy Davidson usefully distinguished between higher and lower criticism. The latter has to do with "all questions regarding the text of Scripture, such as various readings, corrupt readings, and possible emendations", while the former embraces questions of a different

kind, "such as those of date, authorship, unity of composition, and the like; and, of course, the principles, in accordance with which such questions can be properly decided."[102] He pointed out that higher criticism's "most powerful instrument", however, was really the idea of the progressiveness of the religion of Israel: "Consequently, the judgement in regard to the authorship of any passage must depend upon the time at which the ideas found in it became current."[103]

He went on to judge that the expression "Higher Criticism" is "certainly somewhat infelicitous", as it has led many unsophisticated individuals to suppose that those who speak of it, and claim to practise it, "arrogate to themselves some capacities which ordinary minds do not possess." This, however, is to misunderstand or misrepresent higher criticism.

> All that sound criticism implies, whether higher or lower, is a competent knowledge of the facts, good judgement, and perhaps a certain tact and instinctive sense, which only great familiarity with language and style can supply.[104]

Biblical criticism, Davidson maintained, was entirely an inductive science.

> Its reasoning is of the kind called probable; and its conclusions attain to nothing more than a greater or less probability, though the probability in many instances may be such as entirely to satisfy the mind.[105]

He also claimed that the science of criticism "eschews the region of abstract principles", and although some who practise it have no doubt spoken of some things, "such as the projection of the prophet's view into the minute circumstances of a period a century ahead of him,

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[102] Old Testament Prophecy, pp.242-243.

[103] Ibid., p.243.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., pp.243-244.

as 'psychological impossibilities'", these statements are aberrations, "though aberrations which, from the love of the human mind for general principles that go further than mere conclusions founded on the registration of facts, it is difficult to avoid."[106] But such are merely the fault of individual men and are not to be laid to the charge of the science itself. Higher criticism is scientific in the fullest and best sense, reasoning immediately from the facts of the prophetic writings and starting from no a priori principles.[107]

Davidson acknowledged that the science of criticism was comparatively new and that until very recently "no one dreamt of doubting that Isaiah the son of Amoz was the author of every part of the book that goes under his name." Those who still maintain the unity of authorship "are accustomed to point, with satisfaction, to the unanimity of the Christian Church on the matter, till a few German scholars arose, about a century ago, and called in question the unity of this book."[108] But, Davidson replied, the reference to the view of the ancient Church creates a prejudice against the critics which is hardly fair, "for their doubts are recent, just because the whole science and direction of mind which taught them to doubt is recent; and it would be as proper to blame the Fathers for not doubting earlier, as to blame the moderns for beginning to doubt so late." The science of historical criticism is of recent origin and is nothing more or less than an outcome of "that direction of mind which has created all the inductive sciences."[109] Davidson saw nothing wrong with that direction of mind

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[106] Ibid., p.244.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid., pp.244-245.

or with its application to the Bible, or with the fact that its results ran counter to the opinion of 2500 years. For him there was nothing sacred about the unanimity of the Christian Church on such matters. The new is not to be regarded as ipso facto evil; it may, in some sense, be regarded as ipso facto good; because God is the God of all history, and history develops.

But this plain approval of inductive science in general and biblical science in particular was balanced by remarks which appear to counter or modify it. He observed that, "It may be to some extent a misfortune, that the literary criticism of the Scriptures has fallen so much into the hands of those who are more scholars than practical Christian teachers."[110] This no doubt has had its advantages, as those who come to the study of the Bible from the outside often see its truth better then those whose training and prepossessions have fixed in them a point of view.

> Nevertheless the critics have not always been sufficiently conscious or have failed to express clearly that their operations are a means and not an end. They too often seem to say when their literary criticism is concluded, Now we have done with the Bible. It is a good sign when scholars like Professor Kirkpatrick feel that the present age has brought new responsibilities to the teachers, and that, besides imparting scientific truth to students in his classroom, he has to mediate between science and the common Christian mind.[111]

Toward the end of the same review he spoke of "the firmness of voice with which the Old Testament says 'God'" and commented on how "The eyesight of the generation of to-day is so impaired by the fumes of the laboratory that the far sight of Isaiah is lost, 'I saw the Lord sitting on a throne'."[112]

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[110] A review of The Divine Library of the Old Testament, by A. F. Kirkpatrick in The Expository Times, vol. III (1891), p.298.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid., p.299.

In what may be an early sermon Davidson spoke of a positive antagonism between science and faith. Our age, he said, may be called a godless age, more godless than any other.

> For the spirit of research and science is wholly against faith; and its example is infectious. Its glory is to banish faith out of its own sphere. And every new discovery seems to push God farther back, and all life seems connectedly a chain of evolution, one thing rising up out of another; and if the process could once be started, it would go on. And though at present it seems that something, or someone, called God, must have started it, yet this may be admitted to be a subject for conjecture.[113]

He concluded by saying that those listening to him might not believe this, but there were people who did believe it and their influence was being felt. "It exercises a deadening effect upon our belief; for there is prevalent a spirit of suspense, an inclination at least to wait till we see which is very adverse to faith."[114]

This is altogether different, it would seem, from the views of William Robertson Smith and George Adam Smith, or even Davidson himself in other places, which held that science would vindicate faith because the spirit of the one was really the spirit of the other, and that God was in the newer critical method, which was simply science in its literary aspect. But perhaps Davidson's thrust here was aimed only at experimental or laboratory science, for he went on to talk about the other aspects of human life, the three-fourths of life which is not analysable in the crucible of the chemist and cannot be reduced to scientific terms at all.[115]

Still, granting that these remarks may be early and that they were made in a sermon and not a treatise, there is evidence that Davidson's

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[113] The Called of God, pp.70-71.

[114] Ibid.

[115] Ibid., pp.71-72.

relationship to the critical spirit of his time, was, throughout his career, ambiguous. There are, for instance, his remarks on "The English Bible and its Revision" written sometime during the revising process in which he himself played so important a role. "The spirit of the present age is extremely distinct and pressing - the Critical Spirit. And that spirit is more unlike than any other to the spirit of the Scriptures."[116] In one of his lectures he once went so far as to say that science actually nourished unbelief, because it was either negative or neutral.

> Among a large part of those who do not deny that Scripture is the word of God, or that it contains the record of miraculous occurances, there is no living belief beyond this condition of merely not denying; among a number of others we observe an actual disbelief. This disbelief feeds on many things. It is ministered to by all those general conceptions of the human race, and of the universe, which an extended science is so fruitful in producing. And thus the miraculous disappears, and the word of God, which is a miracle, disappears with it.[117]

Davidson appears to have been undecided about how he felt concerning science and the biblical criticism which was simply a particular species of it. On the one hand he agreed that it had a perfect right to ask its questions, and one was misguided to say it violated the consensus of two millennia of Christian thinking. Being modern, it simply could not be a rehearsal of ancient truths, any more than the old views could have anticipated new ones: the new should not be condemned for being new any more than the old should be condemned for being old. On the other hand he seemed to be very wary of the scientific and critical spirit, with a caution which expressed itself in distrust and even downright opposition. The spirit of science and of criticism, he seemed to say, is antagonistic

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[116] Biblical and Literary Essays, p.218.

[117] Old Testament Prophecy, p.288.

to the spirit of the Scriptures. Its cold and clinical objectivity kills faith.

Davidson's attitude should not be left there, however. In other places he showed a keen awareness that there was another side to the problem. If it turns out that science and the Bible disagree, he said, the question is not whether the one is more or less credible than the other, but whether they speak of the same things and whether they speak of them from the same point of view. Seen in this way it may turn out that there is no conflict at all. We should therefore be hesitant about setting one in opposition to the other or of trying to effect a harmony between them. "The maxim that the Bible and nature having the same Author cannot contradict one another, in itself a right maxim, may become mischievous if we set out with unjust notions of the two, or assume that the Bible and science deliver testimony within the same sphere."[118] When we do compare the two in some such forced and undiscriminating way it usually happens "either that scientific results are denied, or said to be so immature that nothing can be founded on them, or else such a haze is thrown around Scripture that practically all meaning is denied to it."[119] Both science and Scripture suffer, but more often than not Scripture gets the worst of it. Science and Scripture always look at things from a different point of view and it is of first importance to keep that in mind. Science busies itself with the physical constitution of the world and man under physical law. "This is an idea unknown to the Old Testament. In its view the world is a moral constitution, all the phenomena of which illustrate moral law and subserve moral ends." Any apparently physical affirmations which Scripture makes are only "the vehicle or indirect means of moral

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[118] The Theology of the Old Testament, p.496.

[119] Ibid., pp.496-497.

statements."[120] Thus both the Bible and Science must be taken for what they are and Principal Tulloch can be criticised by Davidson for "mixing up the views of Scripture and the results of science."[121]

Davidson seemed to be able to take from modern scholarship the best it had to offer. At the same time he seemed to have doubts about the very spirit which animated it. He was critical in a halting but nonetheless refreshingly individual way. And pessimistic as he was about the scientific spirit, he was aware that between the Bible and science there might not be, after all, a real conflict.

But the flavour of his critical style is best obtained from his comments on various critics and their views.

b. Some Critics In Particular

One of the trends in criticism which he objected to on more than one occasion was that of dating books or passages on the basis of a general "circle of ideas" to which it was alleged they belonged. In the introduction to his commentary on Habakkuk, for instance, he remarked that if the date of Habakkuk had to be fixed from the circle of his ideas alone the prophet might be assigned to the end of the Exile or later. This instance shows how precarious such theories are. "The literature is far too scanty to enable us to trace the course of religious thought and language with any such certainty as to fix the dates at which particular ideas or expressions arose."[122] He made the same point in an essay on "The Wisdom of the Hebrews."[123] In the

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[120] Ibid., p.497.

[121] Ibid., p.513.

[122] A. B. Davidson, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: University Press, 1896), p.62.

[123] Biblical and Literary Essays, p.39; Cf. The Theology of the Old Testament, p.157.

introduction to his commentary on Zephaniah he challenged Wellhausen's dating of certain verses; and the whole introduction is in its own way a refutation of much critical method, arguing as it does for the integrity of the book against the more radical surgeons.[124]

Wellhausen frequently came in for criticism, often enough in Davidson's comments on the work of those whom the immensely learned German had influenced. An example is Rudolf Smend's Alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte.[125] Smend's general position is Wellhausen's, said Davidson, insofar as it involves not only certain views of Pentateuchal literature, but in addition a general theory of the religious history of Israel.

The distinction which Davidson made between critical method and critical theory is helpful, and indicates that the review of Smend deserves more attention than its brevity would suggest, as revealing a good deal of Davidson's own critical procedure. Although Davidson referred to Smend's work in general as excellent, he criticised the author for excising many texts "for no reason but that they conflict with a theory, while the balance of probability has not yet been shown to be in favour of the theory."[126] The relationship between a particular approach to the literature and general theories which grow out of its application must be fair: the theory must "react upon the text and descend to the lower or textual criticism, because many passages are found, some even in very early books such as Hosea, which do not accommodate themselves to the theory and have to be dealt with."[127]

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[124] Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah, pp.95-107.

[125] Review of Rudolf Smend's Alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte in The Critical Review, vol. IV (1894), pp.12-18.

[126] Ibid., p.13.

[127] Ibid.

Smend also had divided the history of Israel into three periods, pre-prophetic, prophetic, and legal, and he regarded much in the pre-prophetic as legendary. Davidson was not happy with this either. For "instead of following the Old Testament representation regarding the Patriarchs and the early religious condition of Israel, he prefers to construct an idea of what they were in morals and religion from an investigation into the condition of the surrounding peoples to whom they were allied."[128] But again, the materials for such an investigation are too scanty to yield certain results, and the assumption that at the period of the Exodus, or before, Israel and these peoples stood altogether on the same plane, is a precarious one to make.

> While the creative genius and influence of Moses cannot be conceived too highly, his very greatness makes it not unlikely that some Hebrews before his day had glimpses of that which he saw face to face. The prophets drew on Moses and the past, and it is not just at once to be assumed that Moses had no past to draw on. Neither does it quite dispose of Abraham and Hebrew tradition regarding him to affirm that he is merely an idealised type of Israel, a glorified presentment of Israel's conception of itself and of its place in the world.[129]

This is a fairly clear statement of Davidson's general position on several issues - on the historicity of the patriarchs and the theories related to that problem, also on the method of solving it. At least he seems to be giving preference to "following the Old Testament representation regarding the Patriarchs" over "an investigation into the condition of the surrounding peoples to whom they were allied."

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[128] Ibid., p.15.

[129] Ibid. For Davidson's similar approach to the question of whether the promises made to Abraham were not simply statements about what in fact did eventually happen when Israel acquired Canaan made by later historians and "reflected back upon a much earlier time", see The Theology of the Old Testament, pp.176-178.

But Davidson chose not to discuss whether Smend's opinions were true, and although he criticised him on certain matters of procedure, he maintained that his review was not the place to enter into controversy.[130] The review of Smend is good, nonetheless, and but one example of many contributed to The Critical Review (there are three in this volume alone) which on its own might vindicate the judgement of George Adam Smith that to The Theological Review Davidson contributed "some of the best theological criticism of the last quarter of the century."[131]

Something of the way in which Davidson could strike, without the salt even of wit or sarcasm, may be felt in this comment on a tract by Arndt on "The Place of Ezekiel in Old Testament Prophecy." It is, Davidson said, "perhaps the most prejudiced and ill-informed thing ever written even on Ezekiel!" Arndt "appears to have read only Smend's Commentary; when he comes to read the prophet's own writings he will do better."[132] Of Duhm's Jesaia, another work covered in the same review, Davidson remarked:

> There are many things in Duhm's work which few will agree with, a number of things which perhaps nobody will agree with, methods that will be considered wrong, and principles that will be held false, and as a result of them conclusions that will be absolutely rejected, but everyone will acknowledge the great ability of the Book, even the brilliancy of some parts of it.[133]

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[130] Review of Rudolf Smend's Alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschicte in The Critical Review, vol. IV (1894), p.13.

[131] "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 3, p.176. In 1891, after four volumes, The Theological Review and Free Church College Quarterly became The Critical Review. For a brief history of its founding, and Davidson's relationship to it, see Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.305ff.

[132] A review of Duhm's Das Buch Jesaia, The Critical Review, vol. III (1893), p.13.

[133] Ibid.

Here the nearly lethal blows are dignified by credit given where it is due.

Perhaps the most important feature of this review of Duhm, however, comes in what may be Davidson's assessment of critical procedure in general. The starting point of Duhm's operations, and the test or criterion employed in them, Davidson said, is a certain view of the religious history of Israel and the nature of the progress of religious ideas among the people; herein, he claimed, the real interest and contribution of Duhm's work lay. It was the first continuous application of modern principles to an ancient writing and the results were startling. But "the extraordinary results are due not to the principles, but to an exaggerated or extravagant way of conceiving and applying the principles."[134]

Davidson also reviewed a selection of Kuenen's essays edited by Budde in 1894, and among the things which engaged his attention were "the author's general principles and the bearing which these and his results have upon the Christian Church."[135] To our poverty Davidson did not say more. What an enrichment had he taken the opportunity to make an extended comment on the relationship between critical principles and Christian faith: once again he chose not to do so. But the mention of the topic indicates that he was well aware that there was such a relationship and that the way in which it was perceived mattered.

On Kuenen, Wellhausen and the method and view of which they are the best exponents Davidson did comment, however. In understanding, Kuenen is a man, Davidson said. But Kuenen lacked something. "Perhaps it is those things which Budde comprehends under the term 'genial',

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[134] Ibid., p.15.

[135] Review of Kuenen's Gesammelte Abhandlungen, The Critical Review, vol. iv, (1894), p.357.

things of which elsewhere Kuenen recognises the need in criticism, but which hardly belonged to his own mind."

> The explanation of the three Davids given by Kuenen in illustration of his Method, the true David of some parts of Samuel, the David of the superscriptions to the Psalms, and the levitical David of the Chronicles, will to some hardly appear satisfactory. The historical germ postulated, whether Davidic or Mosaic, always seems too small to account for the dimensions of the later growth. We are lost in admiration of the ingenuity which by a few strokes of logic develops the one out of the other, and as Mr. Saddletree expresses himself, "has cleckit this great muckle bird out o' that wee egg."[136]

Wellhausen's theory (in his Abriss) of the development of ideas of God is of a similar kind. On it Kuenen had relied and on it Davidson remarked:

> The "Jahwe" who does such things, as he is represented by Wellhausen as doing, must have been able, and felt to be able, to do much more. Those who cherished the thoughts of him attributed to the people, could not have so felt regarding him without feeling a multitude of other things similar or even greater. We are not sure whether the steps of advance described in Wellhausen's sketch be due to Jahwe as he represents him, or to Jahwe under much broader conceptions of him. We feel as if the stream which Wellhausen uses to drive a mill might have floated a navy.[137]

Ewald "when rightly understood", Davidson regarded as "really one of the most conservative and even orthodox of critics",[138] and his judgements of Scripture, "whether we acquiesce in them or not, are always dignified and worthy."[139] Of T. K. Cheyne, with whom apparently he was not on the best of terms, he was not so complimentary. Cheyne had once claimed that if Robertson Smith had lived a few years longer, he would have regarded Moses as a purely legendary figure. According to Strahan, Davidson replied to Cheyne with "a scathing rebuke of this

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[136] Ibid., pp.356-357.

[137] Ibid.

[138] Biblical and Literary Essays, p.162.

[139] Old Testament Prophecy, p.60.

irreverence to the memory of an illustrious scholar" and concluded by saying:

> This critic, chameleon-like, has reflected in succession critical opinions of every colour and complexion. In him there is no continuance. Contrasting Moses with Dr. Cheyne, we may certainly say that Moses at least persists.[140]

Following Renan's death, Davidson spoke to his Senior Class of "the accomplished author of the Vie de Jesus": "His mind stood as it were at a certain angle, and the light which fell on it was reflected in colours which were sometimes fantastic, but always beautiful."[141] But in a review of books on Ecclesiastes which Strahan quite rightly considered "ought to have found a fitting place in his posthumous works", Davidson made Renan (and Cheyne and others, for it was a review of many works) the object of some of his most entertaining word-play. One or two quotations will have to suffice to illustrate the zest of what is throughout a most attractive display of wit and wisdom and graceful prose.

> Renan cannot conceal his ecstasies over the astonishing artist who has left us this charming morceau; it is the only amiable thing that ever came from the pen of a Jew. Bound up with the other books of the Bible, it is as if a little tract of Voltaire had gone astray among the folios of a theological library. The secret of Renan's delight is that he discovers in the Book a Renan living a century or two before Christ. The Preacher of Dr. Cheyne is a contemplative person with a syncretistic turn of mind, meditating, tablets and pencil in hand, and then turning out the undigested contents of his note-books upon mankind.[142]

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[140] Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.308-309. On the relationship between Davidson and Cheyne, as well as between Davidson and A. B. Bruce, see Ibid., pp.287ff.

[141] Ibid., p.308.

[142] "Some Recent Books on Ecclesiastes", The Theological Review and Free Church College Quarterly, vol. III (1888), p.1. Strahan's opinion of this piece comes in his bibliographical essay on Davidson in The Expository Times, vol. XV, p.452.

And again on Renan:

> Renan's picture is at least a good work of art. His preacher is not only a sceptic, but what might be called a sceptic in the second degree. It is this that distinguishes him from the men of earlier times like Job. If he heard the latter reviling providence for its injustices he would smile, and say, Of course. It is so well known! One might upbraid heaven, but it is so useless. Practically, the preacher does not much like this side of things. When he sees an ugly sight he shrugs his shoulders, and seeks a more comfortable scene. . . . His humour is a kind of cheery self-mockery, subjecting the anomalies of life to a badinage which finds pleasure in its own cruelty, manipulating the sorrows of mankind like a prestidigitateur, tickling the quivering lips of his own wounds. He is like a paralytic who dwells with a half-amused mockery on his own helplessness. Yet in the midst of his banter one can sometimes notice that his eyes are moist. (Though the world had not suspected it, like the King of Samaria, Mr. Renan also wears sackcloth - of a refined texture - under his fashionable tunic.) [143]

Besides this feast of tantalizing reading, examples of which could be quoted from any page, the review contains Davidson's own view of Ecclesiastes - it is not Renan's view: the Book is didactic and "everywhere serious" - and insights which perhaps could only have been formed in a soul tuned very like that of the Preacher himself. Indeed it is precisely Davidson's insight or sympathy (one keeps coming back to such words) that are the source of his potency as critic - of other critics, of the critical endeavour taken as a whole, and of the Scriptures themselves. The difference between Ecclesiastes and other books of the Old Testament, Davidson said, was not in the Preacher's religious beliefs, for they are all in line with the rest of Scripture, or in his complexities, for Job has expressed them with more intensity.

> The difference lies in the preacher's tone. And this is a complex thing: it is partly a personal temperament, and it is perhaps even more a religious phase of mind.

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[143] "Some Recent Books On Ecclesiastes", The Theological Review and Free Church College Quarterly, vol. III (1888), p.4.

> To catch the preacher's tone truly would be to find the key to his book.[144]

It is a commentary on Davidson himself.

The foregoing has been an attempt to illustrate something of the relationship that obtained between Davidson and the modern critical scholarship of his day. He had read it, understood it, and in every important sense sympathised with and relied on it.[145] At the same time he could be wonderfully impervious and sometimes, it appears, even antagonistic to it. W. H. Bennett once argued in fact that Davidson had acted as a kind of restraint on critical advance. He instanced Davidson's case against dating a text on the basis of its circle of ideas as a partial explanation of "why many, even amongst younger scholars, hesitate to accept some recent developments of criticism."[146] D. S. Margoliouth described Davidson's critical position as "eminently moderate" and believed that while Davidson held the main principles of the modern school, and perhaps did more than anyone else to secure their general acceptance, he was, "if anything, ultra-cautious" in applying them. "He would only commit himself to results that seemed absolutely certain, and he was apt to dismiss extreme positions and rash speculations with that quiet sarcasm of which he was a master."[147] A. B. Bruce, one of a remarkably limited circle who found fault with Davidson, once charged him with not keeping his place

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[144] Ibid., p.12.

[145] In the "Notes of Literature" at the end of The Theology of the Old Testament, for instance, there is hardly an English title - a few articles of his own supplemented by one or two from W. R. Smith, T. K. Cheyne or R. H. Charles, but the vast majority are German. The same is true of Old Testament Prophecy.

[146] W. H. Bennett, "Some Recent Old Testament Literature", The Expositor, fifth series, vol. V (1897), pp.236-237.

[147] The British Weekly, 30th January, 1902, p.421.

in the van of the movement he had created. "He has rather lagged behind or stood on one side, while the company of the prophets marched past . . . ."[148] Bruce's comment may have to be taken with a slight pinch of salt considering their personal differences. Nonetheless it supports the consensus: eminent critic though Davidson was, he seemed also to be a most hesitant one.

Davidson's View Of The Bible

As it was for his more traditional predecessors, the Bible for Davidson was both a divine book and a human book. In what may be the first journal article he ever wrote, he put it as aptly, and as firmly, as they did.

> Scripture does not consist of a divine and a human - it is all divine-human. It is not a piece of cloth, with a right side and a wrong. It is one of those changing-coloured robes, curiously woven and delicately dyed, of which one part is not of one colour, and another part of a different colour, but of which all parts are of two colours, according to the light and the angle at which they are seen - which, looked at in one light is human, and looked at in another is divine.[149]

Davidson's agreements with the older writers are more than balanced by his disagreements, however. For one thing, he everywhere insisted that the Bible was a record of men's religious experience, not a book of doctrine. What the systematic theologians had omitted, he claimed, was the fact that the Old Testament was religious experience before it became Scripture. The older writers regarded revelation (in Davidson's words) as "the delivery of doctrine", and they meant by it "the communication, from an intellectual and otherwise empty human mind,

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[148] Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.287-289. Bruce's comments are quoted from "The Rev. A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. VIII (1896), p.261.

[149] "The Recent Introductions to the Old Testament", The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. X (1861), pp.736-737.

of some abstract and universally valid religious idea." Such views of revelation and uses of the Bible may sometimes be legitimate, Davidson conceded, but they failed to correspond to Scripture's idea of itself: they failed to regard the historical, "which is of the essence of the Old Testament", and likewise "the personally religious in the writers, which is also of its essence."[150]

> Thus we do not go to the Old Testament with any general conception that it is the word of God spoken to us. We do not go to it with this conception, but we arise from it with this conception. This is the thing which will be made plain to us, - the personal religion of all the writers of Scripture, their life to God and with God.[151]

The Bible, at least the Old Testament, is then essentially the record of the religious experience of its writers, and on a broader scale, that of the nation of and for whom they speak. This particular understanding of what the Bible is may suggest a contrast between the all-important experience and the mere record of it. If the Bible is not doctrine, to what extent is it history, and how are we to regard the accuracy of its details? As Davidson put it, "The body is more than the raiment, and the idea more than the fact."[152] In other words, the exact details of the history, especially the early history of Israel, may not matter if the truth conveyed is fully grasped. There were great facts and events to be sure, but they gave rise to the idea and "the idea once born, with vital energy transformed details, in order perfectly to express itself."[153] For similar reasons the Bible has left us ignorant of a great deal of the history of mankind.

> It is of God, not of men, that the Bible speaks. It begins by showing us His hand in the creation of all things. From Creation to the Exodus it gives us a few signal illustrations of His moral rule of the world. But what a broad world of mankind is

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[150] Biblical and Literary Essays, pp.318-320.

[151] The Theology of the Old Testament, p.4.

[152] Biblical and Literary Essays, p.319.

[153] Ibid.

> hardly referred to! What a human vitality and energy during four or five milleniums in the valleys of the Euphrates and the Nile is passed over, as if it deserved no mention! Only one thing it tells us - that God has been in the history of mankind from the beginning.[154]

Davidson's view of Genesis is illuminative of what might be called his general habit of thinking about the Bible and of his application of critical procedures to it. The parallel between Genesis and the Babylonian stories, he said, tends to show that the biblical stories are not unique. "They are reproductions of traditions and modes of thought common to a large division of the human race." And that heritage of thought which Israel brought with it from the East was not obliterated, but rather modified, "shot through and illuminated with the rays of true religious light."[155] At the same time it must be claimed that "the first ten chapters of Genesis, and much more the stories of the Patriarchs from the twelfth chapter onwards, have all a real historical basis, and are not mere ideal inventions."[156] Indeed the similarity between the biblical and the Babylonian stories might suggest, in a remote way, that both are grounded in fact.[157] Thus Davidson nicely employed the tools of criticism, with caution and no intent merely to shatter older conceptions (or to defend them either, for that matter), so that phrases such as "like other stories of the time" need not necessarily mean uninspired or unhistorical. Still, in all our speculation about the historical basis of books like Genesis, we must keep in mind the nature and purpose of the Bible, which is not to deliver doctrine or to teach history.

What makes Davidson's view of Scripture fully critical is the pride of place he gave to the purpose for which it was originally

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[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid., p.303.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid.

written. Because we have used it for so long almost exclusively for moral and religious teaching, he said, we have the feeling that the Bible was given at first hand to us in our present circumstances. But God spoke to the fathers primarily. He spoke to us only mediately, "because we and they alike belong to His historical Church."[158] That does not mean, however, that the written word of God has less lofty qualities than when it was first spoken of old, for when we look at the Prophets in particular we see that the spoken and the written word are really identical. The written prophecies are simply condensations of the spoken ones. But the point is that whether in speech or in writing the prophets had a single aim with regard to their hearers, "to live unto God and to teach them the way." In all other things, they leave the people as they find them, with their superstitions, credulities, customs and thoughts, except where these might conflict with a true knowledge of God and of holy living to Him. If they refer to nature or to the material world they do so only in order to show that all men and nations are in God's hand and that the universe is a moral constitution.

> To draw edification from the Bible happily needs little knowledge, but to understand it as a whole we need constantly to remember its historical character; and perhaps we should best learn to comprehend it by studying the oral communications of the teachers of Israel. The methods and aims which they pursue are the methods and aims of the Bible as a whole, and the things which they neglect the Bible as a whole neglects.[159]

The best way to understand the Old Testament, he wrote in another review, is to regard it as given in its various parts to Israel for those purposes, and no other, for which ordinary religious minds read it today.

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[158] A review of Kirkpatrick's Divine Library of the Old Testament, The Expository Times, volume III (Oct. 1891-Sept. 1892), p.299.

[159] Ibid.

"It was given to enable men to live unto God, in the circumstances in which they were and with the notions on all other subjects which they had."[160]

The thing that distinguishes Scripture from modern literature, Davidson said, is its consistency. On specific subjects like sin and death, for instance, the Bible is self-consistent. But the full view is nowhere presented at once, and so, in order to pass a just judgement as to the Scripture's teaching on any particular subject, we have to familiarise ourselves with the whole of Scripture. Acquiring this familiarity, however, takes the labour and experience of a lifetime. For, as Davidson had often said, Scripture is a literary work, written in the language of life, in whatever ways of thinking and speaking men have. "All forms of human composition that the genial, subtle, various, calculating, enraptured human mind may employ tc express itself, may be looked for in it."[161] This being so, "The ways of reaching its sense are a thousand."

> One must lay bare all his sensibilities, and bring himself en rapport with it on every side, and weigh general statements and make the necessary deduction from a hyperbole, and calculate the moral value of a metaphor, and estimate and generalise upon sentiments that are never themselves general, but always the outcome of an intense life in very particular conditions, and even take up with his dumb heart "the groanings that cannot be uttered."[162]

Withal, he concluded, two positions are to be firmly maintained. One:

> Scripture has a meaning and a view of its own on most moral and religious questions; and although different writers present that view with all the variety natural to their differing minds and diverse

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[160] Review of Riehm's Alttestamentliche Theologie, in The Critical Review, vol I (1891), pp.34-35.

[161] The Theology of the Old Testament, p.514.

[162] Ibid.

circumstances, there is still a unity of view, not to be had from any single text but from "the whole general tenor of thought of the Scripture writers." Two: the meaning of Scripture can be ascertained from Scripture alone and "ought not to be controlled by anything without." Our interpretation of prophecy for example ought not to be made dependent on historical events now occurring or that have occurred, nor our interpretation of Scripture's statements regarding creation or the constitution of man "submitted to the judgement of geologists or writers on physiolgy."[163]

Davidson's view of Scripture then is firstly, that it is literature, written "in the language of life, and not in that of the schools", originally given in a particular time and place and for a particular (religious) purpose. It is art, perhaps even national or folk art, but it is not science or philosophy. And even though it is undeniably religion, the history of man's experience of God, it is not theology. Secondly, the Bible can be apprehended best, or only, by baring all one's sensibilities to it - spiritual and mental and aesthetic - and the operative word is "all." The Bible is not a book for the intellect alone, because it is, again, a literature of a most multi-faceted kind. Thirdly, the Bible, its varied character notwithstanding, is consistent in its views of life and morals, and in this it is different from other and modern literature. Fourthly, the Bible must be judged with reference to itself. It must be read and interpreted in its own light; its meaning cannot be governed either by dogmatic or, on the other hand, scientific considerations.

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[163] Ibid., pp.514-515.

a. Revelation And Inspiration

Davidson did not often direct his full attention to "the question of revelation", or that of inspiration, except in the case of the inspiration of the prophets which was a primary interest of his. Nonetheless it is easy enough to find out what his views were. At least he made it fairly plain what he believed revelation and inspiration were not.

In that same early review for The British and Foreign Evangelical Review in which he spoke of the divine-human nature of the Bible he criticised McDonald's Introduction to the Pentateuch on the grounds that

> Revelation seems to him to consist in the Deity telling his creatures such and such things, or outwardly imposing certain obligations upon them; a divinely conditioned and produced consciousness originating on impulse which could not be repressed, and which was felt to be authoritative - he does not comprehend.[164]

Davidson protested that McDonald's view was neither Scriptural nor consistent with what he called "the general mode of God's revelation." God, he said, spoke in men, "at least, the prophets so believed and expressed themselves." In the same journal two years later, however, he expressed exactly the opposite opinion. He attacked Samuel Davidson for asserting that God can speak only through men's spirit and cannot speak to men, maintaining that God certainly can and did speak, even audibly, to them.[165] It must be admitted that between these two articles there appears to be some inconsistency. But what he seemed to be opposing in the second was not so much Davidson's theory of inspiration in particular as Davidson's overall theology of immanence which denied all miracles in the usual sense. What he opposed in

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[164] "The Recent Introductions to the Old Testament", The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol X (1861), p.727.

[165] "Recent Attacks on the Pentateuch - Davidson and Colenso", The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. XII (1863), pp.399ff.

his criticism of McDonald were all notions of revelation as "static" or cut off from its historical context. In what seems to be an untypical use of language for the period, he argued that a revelation implied three things, "a revealer, a revelee, and the thing revealed", and a revelation is impossible without all three.[166] His point was that all revelation(s) must be regarded in the light of (1) "the condition of the hearer" and (2) the overall purpose of revelation, which is man's redemption. So that any consideration of revelation must take into account both the particular historical circumstances in which it was given and the whole history of revelation of which it is/was a part. Speaking of Genesis 3.15 he said:

> Revelation is a thing given by God to men, and it conforms rigidly to the usual laws of history and progress; there is nothing disjointed or isolated in it, and where we find passages clearly Messianic, apparently disconnected, we must explain them by the general modes of thought and life of the people into which they fitted, and out of which they sprung.[167]

Revelation for Davidson is not limited to what he called "sporadic flashes of the divine, of which we can neither see the immediate cause nor the general connection." It comes to men, often in men, and in a way which conforms to "the usual laws of history and progress." It has a past, a present, and a future. That is, it is progressive. Very often, therefore, perhaps especially in the case of the prophets, revelation and inspiration are the same thing and the Bible is not itself a revelation but the record of a revelation. "We are not here concerned with the absurd quibble about a book-revelation", he had said in introducing the subject. This is a pretty fair statement

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[166] "The Recent Introductions to the Old Testament", The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. X (1861), p.727.

[167] Ibid., p.730.

of Davidson's views of revelation throughout his career.

In the 1862 Job he said:

> There has been too much tendency to dissever Revelation from any relation to the human mind in its origin, and to the men of its immediate time in its application. We have been too apt to look at it as coming from heaven like a meteoric stone, amazing to the spectators, but to be analysed and used only by a subsequent era. Scripture is not so, it comes rather like the rain, blessing the immediate earth and man where it falls, and falling primarily for this purpose; yet not by this exhausted, but sliding down and becoming perennial springs, to flow and be drunk at by us, and all generations for ever.[168]

In the Cambridge Job of almost forty years later (1899) Davidson spoke in the same way. Of the revelation of God to Job in His speeches to him, he said that it would have been "altogether unbecoming" for God to enter upon a discussion of His particular providences with Job, also "contrary to His manner of teaching men", which is not to communicate intellectual light to them but "to fill their minds with such a sense of Himself that even amidst the darkness they will take their right place before Him. The object of the divine speeches is not primarily to teach, but to impress."[169]

Sometimes of course God's method was to act the truth. In the Flood and the deliverance from Egypt, in the person of Moses and David, and in Israel's great conflicts with the heathen, God taught the world in its infancy with illustrations. "Like early writing among men themselves, God's early revelation was pictorial. The dispensations antecedent to Christianity are so many picture-books, great systems of hieroglyphs, facts, things and men."[170] Everywhere Davidson opposed theories of revelation which had God as a kind of grand schoolmaster,

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[168] Job (1862), pp.xxxv-xxxvi.

[169] The Book of Job, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: University Press, 1899), p.xxxiv.

[170] Old Testament Prophecy, p.217.

lecturing men. That was not what he called "the manner of God's revelation."

> It is His way first to exhibit truth, rather than to give it plain and articulate utterance. He called Abraham before He taught the doctrine of election; He redeemed Israel before He gave any doctrine of redemption.[171]

Revelation for Davidson is bound up with the relation of God to His Church. And because it is, those who received it in the first instance, in this case the Prophets, "do not seem to have stood on more fortunate ground than ourselves."[172] That is, the process by which they received it "did not differ in its nature from that which happens now" and "the assurance conveyed in both cases was probably the same, an assurance made by the Spirit through the word of its truth."[173] Between Old Testament prophecy and New Testament prophecy Davidson saw no difference, with the exception perhaps that in the Old Testament the Spirit was not always fully present because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7.39).[174]

In a significant passage in one of his sermons Davidson spoke of Christ's "involuntary revelation of Himself" and said that this revelation - the feelings Christ manifested, the way in which He showed Himself moved and affected on occasions - "is almost profounder than the things which he formally spoke."[175] Davidson's language suggests a good deal about his view both of God's revelation and our understanding of it. God sometimes reveals Himself in ways which are not direct; they are simply reflections of His Person

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[171] Ibid., p.234.

[172] Ibid., p.114.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Ibid., p.124.

[175] Waiting Upon God, p.116

which we, as it were, pick up. "Christ taught us by words; but He was Himself the great lesson. His consciousness, if we could but unfold it, and read it off, is the great revelation."[176] And in Christ in fact we have the supreme illustration of inspiration as well as of revelation.

> Thus the infinite condescension of God consisted neither in making use of human words - that would be a species of Doketism, akin to giving Christ a phantasmical body - nor yet in making use of men as the medium through whom to utter words or thoughts - that would be a species of Ebionitism. It consisted in this, that His Spirit begot His own thoughts in man's breast, whence, being conceived, they came forth clothed in perfect human flesh, as the Word of Life came; and that holy thing, thus begotten and thus born, is the Word of God.[177]

With respect to the Bible it comes to this: the Bible is both fully human and fully divine and in order to interpret it correctly both aspects must be considered in their unity. "By 'inspired' we mean that, by the divine influence upon the writers, Scripture is what it is. But what it is we can only learn from itself, from what it says and what it seems."[178] As we interpret Homer homerically we interpret the Bible biblically. But what is meant by "biblical"?

> A current, a tendency, a promise, a prophecy, the spirit of the years to come rising up and imprinting His stamp and signature on all things, the Spirit of Christ, of Revelation, and of the Church, both still imperfect, yet true, and bearing in their imperfection the germ and promise of perfection.[179]

In this early and relatively technical discussion Davidson comes close to saying that the Spirit of Christ which animates the Old Testament is the evidence of the Old's imperfection - in the sense

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[176] Ibid., p.117.

[177] Biblical and Literary Essays, p.16.

[178] Ibid., p.14.

[179] Ibid., p.17.

that the final and full light reveals the shadows of the partial light. The older, more traditional writers would have said that the Old Testament Scriptures are perfect because everywhere they speak of Christ, and He of them. Davidson seems to say that they are imperfect because they (only) point to Him. Or perhaps they are in some sense perfect in this their unique imperfection. In any case Christ is the content and meaning of biblical revelation and His Spirit working, throughout and in us the readers, is the guarantee of both their revelation and their inspiration. That spirit is also what he called "a fixed basis for interpretation."[180] Thus the historical word, revealed under the conditions of time and place, is also the inspired and eternal word; and somehow we must read it and interpret it as both.

b. Development In Scripture

Absolutely central to Davidson's conception of biblical revelation is the idea of development. No possible understanding of revelation can be had, he said, unless the following assumptions are made: first, that revelation, from its earliest beginnings in the Old Testament to its latest statements in the New, is one coherent system of thought; second, that this system gradually grew, and that in the long history of the Hebrew people we can trace it "in good part" from its germs to its flowering; and third, that the system did not advance in the mind of some writer out of all connection with the writer's own experience or his country's life, but rather "the truth progressed in an organic way, and arose through the forms and occasions of a personal and national life, which both religiously and morally was of the profoundest character."[181]

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[180] Ibid., p.16.

[181] Old Testament Prophecy, p.327.

What this means for our interpretation is that we are always having to read the Scripture from two points of view, that of the human author and that of the superintending Spirit. But the two were not always the same. The Spirit could see the whole, the end in the beginning, while the human author's vision was limited and "coloured by the relations amidst which he stood and by the nature of his own mind."[182] Therefore even though Davidson saw the Scriptures as "one coherent system", it was not for him a system in the same sense as it was for the theologians who preceded him. For Davidson the system was growing (organic in his word); for them it was static. Probably he would not then agree that Scripture must be compared with Scripture, unless one meant by the phrase, as Davidson did, that the "truth-germ" in the Old Testament must be compared with its efflorescence in the New. The question, therefore, What was the meaning of the Spirit of Revelation in any particular place?, becomes, he said, What is the form of the truth, taught in that place, in its perfect or highest form? And to answer this question we must have recourse to the ultimate form of the system of revelation in the New Testament.

> The whole was always had in view in giving any part. The part was but an instalment, carrying with it a promise of the whole, and an intention both ultimately to give, and meantime to suggest, the whole. And on account of the progressive and germinant character of the revelation there lay in every fragment or germ of truth a prophecy, for there was in it a determination towards that form which was its perfection of fulfilment.[183]

It is an interesting use of the word prophecy: every Old Testament truth is a prophecy or is prophetic in the sense that it is always

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[182] Ibid., pp.327-328.

[183] Ibid., p.328.

incomplete and always looks toward a more perfect realisation.

Davidson stands between traditional and modern conceptions, or better perhaps, he combines the two in what seems a harmonious kind of way. When, in the case of an Old Testament reference to a Messiah for instance, we ask, what did the writer, in his circumstances mean, we must remember that

> The external events of history, though they cannot be considered as the measure of prophetic truth (as if prophecy were merely the consciousness of history), may always be regarded as what gave occasion to its being spoken, and the varying Messianic element in the Old Testament is but the ideal and glorified reflection of the varying history and institutions of the people.[184]

That is, "The form of all prophecy, even the directly Messianic, varied according to the historical conditions of the people when it was uttered."[185] Or: "The prophet spoke consciously enough, though the Messiah was not in his mind."[186] The prophet spoke then, as all the prophets did, of Messiah, or messianically, but not of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

As Davidson conceived it, the connection between the meaning of the Old Testament prophet himself and that which the later revelation of the New Testament gave it is not simply that the New Testament writers took what the Old Testament prophet never really intended and "filled it out." No, there really was a connection; it was not merely superimposed or fixed on. Regarding Deutero-Isaiah and the Suffering Servant, Davidson said:

> The feeling of the apostles, that that which was said in the Old Testament had a future bearing, and looked forward to the things of Christ, was not without justification. The thoughts of the prophet regarding the meaning of the

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[184] Ibid., p.331.

[185] Ibid., p.334.

[186] Ibid., p.340.

> Servant's sufferings were given him at this early age with a view to their fulfilment in the Son of God, to prepare for it before it came, and to make it credible when it came, and in order, also, to help to the understanding of it.[187]

All the time, however, we must remember that that is a different matter from the question, what, exactly, did the prophet himself have in view? And that is a question that we, as historical interpreters of his prophecy, are under obligation to answer.[188]

Thus it appears that, according to Davidson, we really have two tasks: to discover (1) what was the prophet's meaning for his own time and place alone, and (2) in the light of the fullest revelation, what was/is the meaning of his prophecy? - two distinct questions, but never from a biblical point of view unrelated.

Davidson's remarks concerning the interpretation of prophecy are seconded elsewhere on other subjects. Following a discussion of the attributes of God Davidson remarked:

> These points are all mere commonplaces of Christian doctrine. But it is of interest to see that they are here already in the Old Testament - at all events six hundred years before the Christian age. Christianity brought something absolutely new into the world, but much that it embraces was already prepared for it.[189]

So that although the Bible is the history of a growing and progressive revelation, it has also, early on, the seed germs in it of all that it was to become. "My impression is that even in the most ancient passages of the Old Testament essentially the same thought of Jehovah is to be found as appears in the Prophets and the later literature."[190]

The same may be said of our doctrine of Satan. While it is true that our idea of a fallen spirit filled with hatred of God Himself is

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[187] Ibid., pp.377-378.

[188] Ibid., pp.378ff.

[189] The Theology of the Old Testament, p.174.

[190] Ibid., p.180.

nowhere visible in the Old Testament, and perhaps even more true that the Satan and the Serpent are nowhere given as identical, "there are, however, passages in the Old Testament which form a transition to this, where the Serpent is spoken of as the foe of God and of His people, and the like."[191]

The way in which sacrifice is lifted out of the animal sphere into that of the human in the final chapters of Isaiah is described in a similar way.[192]

Davidson appreciated that more is going on in the literature of the Old Testament than what is inscribed. In this he is unlike the "mere doctrinalists" who find dogmatic inter-connections which are there only because they are superimposed. He is also unlike the "mere factualists" who because they find no explicit connections deny that there are any. He does not say simply, as he might concerning certain doctrines, "The Old Testament teaches no such thing." He chooses rather to recognise and appreciate the genesis and naturalness of an idea and to see the way it developed within the larger context of the Scripture's inspired whole.

The notion of development for Davidson allowed him to have both an old Old Testament and a new New Testament in one Bible. He used it to show, not a growth out of or beyond ancient conceptions, but rather a growth into their fullest expression. The New Testament does not repudiate Old Testament ideas, it gives them their complete or final form.

At one stage of his career Davidson was heavily influenced by Darwin. God, he said, accomplishes first on a small scale what he later perfects. "If one may say so, evolution, development, is beautiful to

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[191] Ibid., p.304.

[192] Ibid., p.307.

Him, as He has made it beautiful to us."[193] The way of the Lord "exhibits a struggle towards complete embodiment, rising as it were through hindrances into forms imperfect, until, by succession and victorious advancement, it reaches perfection."[194] The fin of a whale, he said, is a stage in the development of the arm of a man, and the brain of a fish identical with one stage of the growth of the human brain. And this typology, which we see in nature, we expect in the revelation of God Himself, "when one considers that the same God is the Author both of the scheme of nature and of grace, and remembers the many analogies of other kinds which the two schemes exhibit."[195] Since development or evolution "unquestionably exists in nature" it also exists in revelation.[196] Like George Adam Smith, Davidson saw no incompatibility between evolution and biblical revelation; indeed the former was a primary illustration of the latter. God after all was Author of both.

Much as Davidson made of the idea of development, however, he was not what might be called a "general progress of humanity man." He believed in a hopeful future for mankind - we ought never to be pessimistic in our views of human destiny, he said in one of his sermons, because Christ has come into it, because He believes in it and He has hopes for it, and as He has entrusted men with the work of His Kingdom, they will not fail Him[197] - but he did not believe that progress was a law, a blind force without connection to human or divine will. "We begin to be afraid of what is called Law. Law threatens to push

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[193] Old Testament Prophecy, p.211.

[194] Ibid., pp.211-212.

[195] Ibid., p.213.

[196] Ibid., p.214.

[197] Waiting Upon God, pp.221ff, especially pp.224-225.

God from His throne, and the conscious freedom of the human mind from her seat."[198] There is a law of progress only insofar as God has instituted it and implements it.

Elsewhere Davidson seemed to repudiate the idea of progress altogether. The Old Testament, he argued, is what might be called Theocentric, that is, in it Jehovah operates and accomplishes, and the motives of His operations He finds in Himself.

> Hence the final condition of the world is not in the Old Testament the issue of a long ethical development in human society, ending in a perfect moral world or kingdom of righteousness upon the earth. The final condition is rather due to an interposition, or in a series of interpositions, of Jehovah. These interpositions, of course, are all on moral lines; in the interests of righteousness they are to make an end of sin and bring in everlasting righteousness. But the issue is due to a sudden act, or a sudden appearance, of God, and is not the fruit of a growth in the hearts of mankind.[199]

On the issue of the progress of mankind Davidson was not absolutely clear or consistent. The lack of clarity may have to do with the difference between the kinds of things one says in a sermon and the kinds of things one says in a lecture. It may have to do with the fact that he never dwelt at length on the subject. Or he may have altered his opinion. Nor is there any necessary connection between a typological or developmental conception of revelation, within the bounds of the canonical Scriptures, and a theory concerning human destiny. The general idea of development as it influenced Davidson regarding the latter is perhaps, for present purposes, only interesting. What is important and what Davidson made quite clear is that the revelation of God in history and in Holy Scripture was a progressive

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[198] Ibid., p.225.

[199] The Theology of the Old Testament, p.400.

revelation and apart from an appreciation of that fundamental fact no proper understanding could be had of it.

c. Prophecy

Old Testament prophecy, we are told, was Dr. Davidson's favourite study.[200] The proof is plain - the 500 pages of edited lectures, the numerous journal and dictionary articles, the essays and the sermons dealing with prophecy in general or in one of its aspects, or, as in the sermons, with the life of one of the prophets. There can be hardly any doubt about the importance of this subject for Davidson's teaching and preaching.

The subject is important too for "Faith and Criticism." For if the prophets were not primarily concerned with predicting the future, and, as Robertson Smith seemed to be saying, it does not finally matter if their predictions of a few events actually came true as long as the eternal and spiritual truth of what they were saying was somehow grasped, then what are we to make of what seems to be the prophets' very real interest in just those events? That is, how is our faith in the Bible affected? It is to Davidson's views of what he called prophecy on its predictive side, therefore, that primary attention will be given.

From early in his career Davidson plainly asserted that the prophets should not be read primarily as seers.[201] Prediction is the element in prophecy "which is least essential to its idea, though by some misfortune made to absorb almost all the other elements in our common manner of thinking."[202] In order correctly to understand them

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[200] Old Testament Prophecy, p. v.

[201] That was perhaps the main "critical point" of "The Prophets", an article he wrote for The Family Treasury in 1870.

[202] Old Testament Prophecy, p.5.

and fully to appreciate them in the more or less central role to which criticism had assigned them, the prophets must be seen as men firmly rooted in their own time and place and preaching a message of immediate ethical and religious relevance. They were practical men and preachers, not soothsayers. All this Davidson, like Robertson Smith and George Adam Smith, and modern scholarship in general, affirmed.

What may have set him apart was his recognition that, whether of primary importance or not, prediction was an undeniably salient feature of all prophecy. Prophecy is not identical with prediction, he said, indeed prediction may not be even an essential element in prophecy - "though I should hesitate to affirm that it is not, because almost all, if not all, of the prophets in the remains which we possess of their literary activity contain predictions."[203] If we have lately come to renounce the old notion that prophecy is all or primarily prediction we must not throw out the element of prediction altogether.

> Our mental danger is reaction. When we have emancipated ourselves from one error, we are apt to fall immediately into the error opposed to it. It is perhaps true that mere contingent events are not often predicted, though there are examples even of this; it is chiefly developments of the history and condition of the kingdom of God, but by no means always internal and moral developments. There are also external events on the stage of the world's history, which required to be brought about in order to allow of the inward expansion, which is, no doubt, the main object to which the prophets direct their mind.[204]

In his most mature statement on the subject Davidson said that the new view was "one-sided." The prophets, he declared, never ceased to be seers. "They stand in the Council of J" . . .; and it is what He is about to do that they declare to men. Their moral and religious

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[203] Ibid., p.11.

[204] Ibid., pp.96-97.

teaching is, so to speak, secondary, and due to the occasion."[205] Prophecy must be taken on both a natural and a spiritual level. To take it on only one level is to misunderstand it.[206] Zechariah, for instance, really contemplated physical changes in the earth when he said (14.10) "The land shall be turned into a plain from Geba to Kimmon south of Jerusalem . . ."[207]

William Robertson Smith believed that one of the reasons prophetic predictions could not be taken literally was that, as he put it, "it is impossible that the evolution of the divine purpose can ever again be narrowed within the limits of the petty world of which Judah was the centre and Egypt and Assyria the extremes." Davidson did not say that.

> What movements and migrations there may be among the nations, - what favourable opportunities for again occupying Canaan may arise through complications of the East and West, and the inevitable dissolution of the Turkish empire and its conversion to the faith of Christ, - cannot with certainty be predicted or denied.[208]

Davidson did not argue that Israel literally would be restored to Canaan. On the contrary. But his sympathetic consideration of the language both of the prophets and of the New Testament (in this case Romans 11) indicates, again, that he was an extremely careful and thoroughly biblical scholar, almost perfectly illustrating his own conviction that the Old Testament must be interpreted on its own and in the light of the New.[209]

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[205] "Prophecy And Prophets", Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. IV, p.111.

[206] The Theology of the Old Testament, p.345.

[207] Ibid., p.383.

[208] Old Testament Prophecy, p.471.

[209] The final chapter of Old Testament Prophecy is given over to "The Restoration of the Jews" and is perhaps as fine an example of Davidson's exegetical method as there is.

Davidson seemed to take history more seriously than Robertson Smith, or rather he took more seriously the prophet's own pre-occupation with history. Prophecy is the philosophy of history; not of all history, however, but of Jewish history. And as Jewish history consisted of two factors, human activity and a supernatural divine guidance, prophecy must partake of two factors also, human insight and divine illumination.

> Hence, as Jewish history did not move altogether like ordinary history, but was to some extent led by the supernatural divine element in it, prophecy must be instructed as to this divine element, and be able to anticipate and predict. And thus it was not confined rigidly to generalising on the part of history, or estimating the meaning of the present. Being, so to speak, the consciousness of history, - of a history human and divine, - it could foresee, too, whither the history was moving, and was able with certainty to forecast.[210]

In his little primer on the Exile and the Restoration Davidson summed up his views like this:

> The older view of Prophecy, which identified it with the prediction of future events, has given way to another view which regards prophecy as in the main teaching of moral and religious truth. The old view has, however, important elements of truth in it. The prophet's face was always turned to the future. His hope was in Jehovah alone; his theme always what He was doing or about to do . . . . To the prophetic mind there was no such thing as mere events, and they were all movements towards the consummation of His great work in the world . . . . And thus when the currents of providence, often too sluggish to their eager eyes, received a sudden quickening, when great events were moving and Jehovah visibly interposing in the affairs of the world, they felt that He was taking to Him His great power. It was but a step or two when the kingdom would be the Lord's.[211]

Davidson also made it very clear that prophetic prediction could not be explained away. It could not simply be called shrewd political

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[210] Ibid., pp.98-99.

[211] A. B. Davidson, The Exile and The Restoration (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1899), pp.61-63.

insight, or in the case of anticipations of the nation's dissolution, "the mere pessimistic forebodings of a declining and exhausted age" - because in fact the conditions of the North in the time of Amos, for instance, and of the South in the early days of Isaiah, did not suggest a gloomy outlook.[212] Even less can it be pretended that the predictions are only apparent, having been written post eventum.

> There may be obscure capacities in the mind not yet explored; and there may be sympathetic rapports of human nature with the greater nature around, and of man's mind with the moral mind of the universe, which give results by unconscious processes; and if there be such faculties and relations, then we may assume that they would also enter into prophecy, for there is nothing common or unclean in the nature of man.[213]

According to Davidson the prophet's point of view is like that that sees the great mountain tops of history from a distance: although they appear close on the back of one another, on nearer examination they are seen to be separated by vast tracts and gullies. The prophet's ideas were not dictated by events, rather his prophecies were his practical application to the future of great religious ideas, such as the sure reign of righteousness upon the earth. Moreover the great unheavals during which many of the prophets lived had moral significance, so that the coming judgement, for instance, was (simply) the outcome of the nation's present sin, "thus the present and the final were organically connected, the chain was formed of moral links."[214]

What Davidson seems to have managed is an appreciation both of the sheer predictiveness of prophecy and its very immediate religious and ethical purpose. He did so by recognising in an almost common-sense

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[212] "Prophecy and Prophets", Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. IV, p.120.

[213] Ibid., p.121.

[214] Ibid. Cf. Old Testament Prophecy, pp.352-353.

kind of way that the discovery of any truth brings with it the danger of over-playing it at the expense of other truths, and that while the prophets were undoubtedly great moral teachers there was still a large element of prediction in their utterances which could not be overlooked or explained away.

d. The Bible's Art

No discussion of Davidson's view of Scripture would be complete without some mention of his fine feeling for the Bible's art. He was especially sensitive to and knowledgeable of the poetic, both in Scripture and in other literatures. His essay on Arabic poetry is perhaps the most solid evidence of his expertise.[215] Clearly he understood poetic technique. George Adam Smith commented on the rare combination in Davidson of the exact grammarian and the poetic mind and told how "To the interpretation of Canticles he brought not only the fragrance of the Syrian spring . . . but the kindred airs of many other poetries, both of East and West; . . . while he let his skepticism and his humor play full upon Ecclesiastes."[216] He seemed always aware of the Bible's literary-ness, aware that it was in the first instance literature, and in some cases, very great literature. Deutero-Isaiah's Servant of the Lord was, he thought, "an intellectual creation of surprising brilliancy, a piece of literature to which there is nothing equal perhaps in any other writings that exist." He used similar language of the drama of Revelation. The conflict drawn there by John between the Lamb and His enemies he said was "surely the most brilliant one ever represented in literature."[217] His commentary on

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[215] Biblical and Literary Essays, pp.254-276.

[216] "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 4, p.294.

[217] Waiting Upon God, p.377.

Job shows him quite able to discuss works of art and the way in which they are put together.[218] Such a discussion of drama is not unexpected in a preface to Job; but the point is that Davidson had the fullest appreciation for the architecture of the Bible's individual parts and of the way in which a sense of that might contribute to our understanding of them.

An appreciation of the Bible's art was not meant to be simply a tool with which one extracted doctrine or teaching, however, although it was used in that way and necessary to that end. The Bible can be appreciated for what it is in itself and that has its own rewards. Such an appreciation also indicates something about the way God works in and through men for his purpose of revelation. Commenting once on the difference between Reformation views of Scripture and modern ones he said: "Happily a juster conception of the nature of Scripture now prevails, and we are now prepared to find in it any form of literary composition which it is natural for men to employ."[219] God does not overpower or obliterate, but rather uses men's thoughts, feelings and gifts. Because the language of the Bible is human language it is or may be artistic language. The fact that the Bible was the product of the mind of man as well as the mind of God meant for Davidson that its art could be appreciated without in any way suggesting that it was less than inspired. Davidson was not guilty of prejudice against the combination of human creativity and divine revelation either in Scripture or in ourselves.

> The writers of Scripture certainly do not despise literary splendour, nor do they consider it superfluous, much less injurious. Their whole minds, intellect, and imagination are consecrated to God,

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[218] See for instance, p. xxi, also p. 1 of The Book Job, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (1899). See also his explanation of the structure of Revelation in Waiting Upon God, pp.351ff.

[219] The Book of Job, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (1899), p. xvi.

> and inspired by Him. The Scriptures, besides being the word of God, are splendid creations of mind; and perhaps in our religious compositions we might with advantage keep the example of the prophets before us, for they show us that truth may be allied with the highest literary power and brilliancy without any detriment to the truth.[220]

Davidson's View Of Faith

The fundamental difference between Davidson and the dogmatic school which preceded him on the question of how to handle Scripture was that he unequivocably discountenanced all approaches to the Bible which began from the side of doctrine. His view of faith was of a piece with his view of interpretation. The knowledge of God is not to be had by a process which is primarily rational. Certainly it is not a matter of doctrine, of comprehending truths. Intuition, even feeling, not the reason, is the means of spiritual apprehension. Religion begins, he said in his Inaugural, as "a certain vague unresolved feeling and consciousness of God; . . ."[221] Principal Harper spoke of Davidson's "faith in spiritual intuition and his deep emotional response to the love of God which was the very foundation of his character."[222] And of the "evidences" of the faith, the study of which formed the basis of so much early nineteenth-century theology, Davidson said, "The evidence which authenticates Revelation is never demonstrative, but always moral. The contents of Revelation have always been the largest part of the evidence for its truth."[223] The essence of faith lies deeper than intellectual judgement, and consequently, "external evidence is never of more than negative

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[220] Old Testament Prophecy, p.445.

[221] Biblical and Literary Essays, p.2.

[222] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.113.

[223] Biblical and Literary Essays, p.46.

and secondary value."[224]

In one of his sermons he acknowledged the possibility of a conflict between faith and reason and counselled that in the event we ought to choose faith.

> If a conflict arise between our instinctive moral feelings and our reasoned system, between the milder judgements of love and those of our connected thought, between our inherent faith in the goodness of God and the conclusions which some things in history and in the life of men would lead us to draw, it is wiser to follow the former at the expense of the latter - to hold fast to faith in the goodness of God, even where we cannot see it fully verified.[225]

That kind of counsel is expected in a sermon, but Davidson's choice of words is the important thing - "instinctive moral feelings" contrasted to "reasoned system." Neither does the quotation get us very much closer to a definition of faith; indeed the finer distinctions between feeling and faith and intuition are fairly blurred, the words used almost interchangeably. That is pretty much as it is in Davidson; into such distinctions he did not go.

> For though definitions of faith be hard to give, and though no man can tell another what believing is, no doubt the essence of faith is just to realise the presence of Christ with us, to realise Him in such a way as to feel, as clearly as if we saw Him, that He is beside us, does see us, is speaking audibly in our ears, and is ever ready to stretch out His hand to help us. This is faith - true, saving faith.[226]

Faith is a personal thing and not amenable to over-analysis. In essence it is an experience. Nothing is said about believing doctrines at all. A few pages on and on the same theme he made plain his large preference for the man "who never had a theory in his life either of Christian life or true manliness, who never had an abstract conception

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[224] Ibid.

[225] The Called of God, p.131.

[226] Waiting Upon God, p.245.

all his days", but who simply did his duty.[227] In fact, in Davidson's view, St. Paul was firstly a man, neither of enthusiasm nor of intellect, but of experience.

> No man was less inclined to be carried away by a heated brain than he was. In spite of the eminence to which he has been elevated, as preeminently the theologian of the New Testament, no man probably has fewer theories than he has. He plants his foot down everywhere on facts - either on facts of history, or on undoubted facts of human experience. When, for instance, he has to lay a foundation for his great doctrine of justification by faith, he lays the foundation in human experience.[228]

The same is true of Christ Himself. His authority is grounded in His relation to, His experience of God. We believe what He says, we believe in Him, because we believe in that.[229]

Davidson rested his case for faith on experience. He also rested it, as the last quotation suggests, on the facts of history. Indeed he believed that if the great facts of the history of Redemption could be overturned, all would be lost. The religion of the Bible is a historical religion. Our salvation reposes on facts, and any theory which would transmute the great redemptive events of the Old Testament into mere ideas would offer us merely an ideal salvation and leave us where we were.[230] By historical facts he meant such things as the Egyptian bondage, the Exodus, the Sinaitic covenant, and the occupation of Canaan. But, he claimed, not even the most advanced critical position has interfered with any of these. "Marathon or Bannockburn might as easily be disputed."[231]

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[227] Ibid., p.249.

[228] Ibid., p.282.

[229] Ibid., p.335.

[230] "Review of Works on Old Testament Exegesis in 1878", The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. XXVIII (1879), p.359.

[231] Ibid.

The significance of this statement is that it relieves Davidson of the charge of "mysticism", or faith which has little to do with the actual events that make up the history of Redemption, the idea which figures so largely in his overall view of things. But it is also significant because while it expresses a position which he must have obviously held, he voiced it very rarely. He spoke little of "the problem of historicity" in regard to personal belief. Quite clearly the stress was on personal experience; one's relation to God is the bed-rock of faith.

Here the issue is raised of the connection between our relationship to God in feeling or experience and the Bible. On what basis do we construct our case for the authority of Scripture and what indeed is its place in Davidson's general scheme of a Christian faith which is experimental rather than doctrinal?

To the second question there probably is no direct answer as Davidson never addressed it. There is every reason to assume, however, that in a general but no less profound way he "believed in" the Bible and considered it absolutely authoritative for life and faith. Proponent of critical technique though he was, there is, as has been remarked, something conspicuously "old fashioned" about the way in which he used the Bible and was committed to it, and there is little reason to doubt that this attitude was what he thought ought to obtain in the Church at large. Why or how the Bible mediates a saving knowledge of God was not a matter of concern to him. It does, and all experience is proof that it does. Alexander Yule related how once Davidson, after he had spoken at a meeting where there were "earnest inquirers", took up the big family Bible and with tears coming down his cheeks said, "Yes, it's my mother's plain English Bible that does it."[232]

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[232] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.249.

As with Robertson Smith there is not in Davidson a very thorough or cogent explication of the role of Scripture in a relationship to God which is essentially personal, to use Smith's words, or experiential, to use Davidson's. Davidson is less vulnerable on this subject than Smith because he said less about it and is therefore less easy to get hold of. But the universally manifest evidence of his devotion to Scripture coupled with the sheer graciousness of his language in handling it gives to his lack of argument a most compelling quality.

To the first question - on what basis do we construct our case for the authority of Scripture? - Davidson gave no extended answer either, although his views are clear enough. It was that the Bible is, to use the modern phrase, self-authenticating. That is what he meant when he said of "evidences" that the evidence which authenticates Revelation is "never demonstrative, but always moral" and that "the contents of Revelation have always been the largest part of the evidence for its truth." The Revelation brings with it the proof of its own authenticity; it does not need to be demonstrated that it is true before it can be believed.

In those remarks Davidson spoke of Revelation, not of the Bible, and he did not say to what extent he identified Revelation with the Bible. Certainly the Bible was Revelation, but it was not the only Revelation. God's voice, he said, is self-evidencing, in whatever way it is heard - "whether as what we call a supernatural sound from heaven, or as the suggestion of conscience, or as an indefinite conviction of duty, and an impulse we can hardly explain."[233] The same feeling of God's speaking authenticates the Bible to us when we

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[233] The Called of God, p.67.

read it. Upon that we build our case for its authority. As he once put it:

> Starting from the irrefragable testimony of experience that the Bible was the word of God, the Church has in all ages, theorized upon the general conception "the word of God," and hazarded a priori judgements regarding what must be found in it, or what must certainly be absent from it.[234]

Nearly all theories about the Bible (e.g. the notion that the vowel points were inspired) have been abandoned; but even inadequate theories grew out of convictions which were grounded in "the irrefragable testimony of experience."

Faith then consists in a relationship to God which is personal; it is real beyond doubt because it is felt, it is experienced. It has very little to do with doctrine, although doctrine may legitimately be a kind of intellectual concomitant or by-product of faith, inasmuch as our minds require order and system. But the experience of faith precedes and is superior to our system and our reason. By the same token our doctrines about the Bible do not generate our belief in it, rather its self-evidencing truth is the source of all our attempts, largely ill-fated in the long run, to dogmatise about it.

In conclusion two things must be mentioned regarding Davidson's view of faith. The first is that he was keenly aware of the distinction between morality and religion. George Adam Smith, in his eagerness to preach the prophets, tended to blur the distinction, even to identify the two. Davidson knew that they were not the same.

> Have you not felt, when you were striving to inculcate truth upon your child, that the boy's mind was strangely unimpressible, that there seemed no affinity between the religious truth and his heart; that it took no hold of a mind, keen and retentive of all other truth? He was not

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[234] Biblical and Literary Essays, p.305.

> a bad child, not wild, not disobedient, a boy of fine feeling, high-minded, truthful, honourable; but to make him markedly religious seemed beyond you; and you were content, at last, to wait and hope that there was some good thing in him toward God.[235]

He made the same point in reference to Saul. "All the qualities that go to make up a chivalrous character were united in him." He was gallant brave, liberal, loyal, modest and tender. His was an almost immaculate life. Yet he did not please God.[236]

The second thing is Davidson's almost paralyzing sensitivity to the mystery of life and the transcendence of God. The two taken together may partially explain his distrust of logic in theology and his failure on most things to dogmatise and on some things even to comment. The fundamental error of Job's friends, he said, was that they judged Job on the basis of inferences they had drawn about God's character. "They thought they could measure providence . . . . They forgot the incomprehensibility of God."[237] God is not to be taken in hand.

> Our reasoned thoughts of God are mostly sure to be false. A few great reverential thoughts, or rather feelings, about Him is our truest knowledge. Think of, or rather feel His majesty and sovereignty, His holiness and love and grace; but be slow to reason upon them beyond what is written; and slower still to dispute regarding Him. Let every thought be a feeling, let every exercise of mind regarding Him be worshipful. Feel like Moses, that you are entering on the mountain, which is all smoke and in darkness; and you will come out from it full of awe, and in no mood to contest with your fellow-men points regarding God.[238]

After that it could not be difficult to understand why Davidson was not at home with the doctrinaire, either of the traditional or of the modern sort.

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[235] The Called of God, p.146.

[236] Ibid., pp.146-147.

[237] Waiting Upon God, pp.98-99.

[238] Ibid., pp.99-100.

Faith And Criticism

One recent critic has said that "To the end of his days Davidson never really reconciled his (generally orthodox)theological views with his critical views." He continues: "Davidson's position, however, was less explicit and more cautious than that of the Continental critics, and it seems that he was of a more diffident disposition than his some-what rank and impetuous student."[239] As a general assessment it is fair enough. Whether or not Davidson ever reconciled his theological and critical views is not an uncomplicated question, however, as there is little evidence of an attempted reconciliation. Indeed he was extremely cautious, about his critical views, about his theological views, and about the relationship between the two. And between Davidson and Smith there were differences other than that of temperament. While Smith seemed to believe that faith and criticism were in some sense the same thing, that criticism would somehow, someday, vindicate faith, that the advance of the one might well, in the economy of God, mean the advance of the other, Davidson apparently never considered that the two could be related in that kind of way. Certainly he never put criticism first.

> To him it was only the handmaid of religion. There had been myriads of true Christians before Criticism was heard of, and there will be myriads when Criticism is no startling novelty, but the merest educational commonplace. And while he knew that he was rendering a great service to the Word of God in introducing more accurate and scientific methods of interpretation, he never forgot that the real and abiding value of the Bible lies in its message, or that its inspiration is first and best demonstrated by its immemorial saving power in the lives of men.[240]

The relationship between Davidson's faith and his criticism may

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[239] John Keddie, "Professor MacGregor, Dr. Laidlaw and the Case of William Robertson Smith", The Evangelical Quarterly, vol. XLVIII, No. 1 (1976), p.34.

[240] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.249.

be seen in two ways, first, in the way in which he considered his teaching simply a form of preaching, and second, in the way in which his criticism was subordinated to or perhaps even obviated by his faith.

a. Teaching As Preaching

One of the happy features of the eulogies to Davidson's greatness was a friendly and flattering debate about whether he was an inimitable teacher who was also a powerful preacher or whether he was a born preacher whose gift found its fullest and most exquisite expression in the lecture hall. Certainly Davidson did not see himself as a preacher. Innes tells us that he never believed himself called to either the pastorate or to preaching.[241] But that only raises the question in another form: if he was not called to preaching, was he nevertheless not called to preach? Whether his pulpit was a lectern or the sacred desk then becomes almost an irrelevancy.

He did preach in churches of course, but it has become a stock feature of accounts to recall that they were very rarely "boulevard" churches, rather small country ones and often those of former students who had enlisted his favour. The famous Dr. Alexander Whyte of Free St. George's, Davidson's own church, records that "He would never preach for me, often as I besought him to do so, but would steal away to the most obscure pulpit as often as he was invited."[242] Principal Salmond remarked that Davidson "cultivates the shade."

> Like the nightingale, he has his note, but is a bird of shy feather. It is seldom that he is persuaded into occupying the prominent pulpits in our great cities. When he does preach, it is for the most

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[241] The Called of God, p.21.

[242] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.172.

part in rural parishes, and to humble people.[243]

Salmond regretted that Davidson had not preached more. It was a loss to others and to Davidson himself that he had been so unambitious to deliver his message from "pulpits of commanding position." For, as Salmond put it, Davidson "has a message to deliver."[244] Put that way or as it has been in a variety of others, that is pretty much the consensus. Davidson apparently shared the Apostle's compulsion, "Woe to me if I preach not." Strahan reckons that Davidson needed to preach. "No man knew better how 'the burden of the word of the Lord' is lifted from the prophet anointed to preach good tidings."[245] But the comparison with the prophets and prophetic utterance was first made and best expressed by Taylor Innes.

> He has no stock of sermons - never had; and he produces a new one after six months - the period that precedes the parturition of the average volcano. But what is important is that he never produces one at all except when, like the volcano, he has something to utter - something, indeed, that insists on being uttered. First repression, then expression, and generally explosion - that is the history.[246]

Elsewhere Innes speaks of how:

> No man looked less the preacher of smooth things. He stood uncommunicative and unsympathetic, a splinter of his native granite; and the voice, edged with raw accent of the North, came out shrill as if forced from lips of rock. One thing was clear. The man before you could never be a preacher, in the sense of one delighting to impart himself to others, - perhaps not even in the sense of delighting to impart his message. [247]

That is one side of the picture. The other is that drawn by James Hastings: "In spite of all that has been said, in spite of all

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[243] "A. B. Davidson", The Expository Times, vol. VIII (1897), p.443.

[244] Ibid.

[245] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.175.

[246] The British Weekly, 30th January, 1902, p.410. Innes's article, reproduced in this memorial edition, originally appeared in The British Weekly for 19th August, 1887.

[247] The Called of God, pp.54-55.

that he himself said, Dr. Davidson was a preacher first and a preacher most. In the preacher we found the man."[248] There is too the remarkable judgement of James Stalker that "What we have lost in Professor Davidson is a great orator." But between the opinions of Innes and Hastings there is probably very little; moreover Stalker's comment was in reference to Davidson's teaching as much as it was to his preaching. In fact it was of Davidson's lectures that Stalker spoke when he recalled how "it was with much ado that one kept back the tears" and Strahan that, after one of Davidson's twelve o'clock discourses on the prophets, "many of us came down from the top-storey classroom to the Common Hall moved with feelings of pity and awe, thrilled with aspirations of faith and hope, such as never held us even in witnessing the grandest dramas of heroic human passion in conflict with fate."[249]

No one who reads Davidson's sermons can dispute their excellence. They are eloquent, but they are urgent also, and prove that, as Paterson has it in the preface to Waiting Upon God, "this scholar, at least, walked through the world open-eyed."[250] One thinks of his delineation of human goodness/badness in "The Servant of the Lord" (Waiting, pp.50-51), or the psychological insight displayed in his description of the law by which natural cravings if too long repressed, even by periods of spiritual elevation, are apt to assert themselves later with even more than their due force (Waiting, p.118), or the wonderfully poignant treatment of the necessity, amidst so much of human sorrow, of "keeping up appearances" (Called, p.150), or how men

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[248] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.195.

[249] Ibid., p.133.

[250] Waiting Upon God, p. viii.

sometimes preach ever so strenuously the very opposite of what they experience in their own hearts (Called, p.204).

But as Strahan has pointed out, many of the things given to the public as sermons were in fact lectures, even though they also may have been preached in churches.[251] Between Davidson's preaching and his teaching there was no gulf. His disposition and his health fitted him for the divinity hall, but in him, as S. A. Cook wrote, preacher, teacher, and scholar were combined.[252]

There was more to it, however, than simply a combination, in the sense that he was able to do two or three things very well. Davidson's own conviction was not merely that a teacher ought also to be a preacher but that teaching and preaching were identical. "A Chair is neither a higher nor a lower place than the pulpit", he said in his charge to Professor Martin in 1897, "they are the same thing under slightly different aspects."[253] After several pages of excellent but modestly tendered advice on teaching he returned to his theme.

> I said at the beginning that there was little difference between the Chair and the Pulpit. Perhaps I might even go further, and say that the occupant of a Chair will be successful just so far as he makes his Chair a pulpit, and preaches from it. It is this which gives our work any vitality to ourselves, for familiarity soon makes our subject intellectually threadbare.[254]

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[251] "The Writings of the late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Expository Times, vol. XV, p.454. But see Paterson's reply in the same issue, p.568.

[252] Quoted above in the chapter on George Adam Smith, pp. 18-19. On the physical strain which preaching produced in Davidson see Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.172ff; also The Called of God, p.41.

[253] "Charge delivered to the Rev. Alexander Martin at Martin's inauguration as Professor of Apologetics and Pastoral Theology at New College, 20th October 1897", p.53. The charge is bound with Martin's Inaugural Address, "The Problem of Apologetic" (Edinburgh: Macniven and Wallace, 1897).

[254] Ibid., p.58.

Davidson's influence as a teacher came of his awareness that intellectual vitality was derived from spiritual passion. Even the critical faculty, he reckoned, is enhanced or sharpened when its purpose is rightly perceived.

> Those of us who have to expound passages of Scripture, endeavour to think ourselves back into the circumstances and feelings of the men whose words we expound, and when we can enter into their zeal and life toward God, a certain glow suffuses our minds, which we may in some degree communicate to those sitting before us, and thus to all in common the prophet being dead yet speaketh.[255]

b. Faith Prior To Criticism

Hastings's judgement that "In the preacher we have found the man" may be correct. Beyond that is the possibility that Davidson never took criticism absolutely seriously. After recording some of Davidson's "excellent fooling" at the expense of Wellhausen, A. B. Bruce testily said, "It is not for him to select the role of jester while the critical drama goes on."[256] Bruce's impatience is understandable, but he was perhaps not as sensitive as he might have been to the religious side of the Davidson temperament which on its other sides he took fully into account. For whatever fun-poking Davidson did must be seen against the largest possible horizon, that of spiritual realities as he understood them. Criticism was for Davidson merely an instrument of religion, and compared to religion it was not of great importance. Some of his most revealing comments on this issue were made in reference to what is perhaps the most academic and technical enterprise in which he was ever employed, the revision of the English Bible.

> What is to be dreaded in the present revision or any revision nowadays, is the making the Bible a learned

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[255] Ibid.

[256] "The Rev. A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. VIII (1896), p.262.

> book - debasing it from its high place as a book that appeals to the heart, and making it a field for intellectual exercise.[257]

He acknowledged the supposed necessity of adapting the translation to "the demands of this sceptical time" but regretted that "while something will be gained by this, something will be lost."[258] Here he was referring to the principle of always rendering the same Greek word by the same English one. This, he believed, was not necessary, except in doctrinal passages where "it is essential that the same term should always appear with the same rendering." His primary concern was not a particular canon of interpretation, however, but rather the whole general spirit by which it was worked. He feared pedantry, "the pedantry of exact scholarship and the critical consciousness." Men could not translate without having critical questions in view, without "bringing out every point that tells in critical discussion", and that "will certainly make a version strained where before it was easy."

One could almost have wished the revision had been delayed, he said, "till this fever of critical discussion had somewhat abated."

> May we not hope that Criticism will have its day, and that some of us may live to see it as much a matter of the past, as some of the subtle doctrinal discussions of the middle ages or the seventeenth century? Will the time not come when men will care little who was the author of documents, when the question asked will not be, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas was the author of an epistle, but whether the epistle contains sound advice? If this time does come and if the revision had been executed then, it would have been easier, simpler, less full of points, adapted more to nourish Christian feeling than to feed intellectual subtlety.[259]

This says a great deal of course and raises many questions. What is obvious enough, however, is Davidson's over-riding desire to be done with discussion and to get on with the primary business of nourishing

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[257] Biblical and Literary Essays, p.212.

[258] Ibid.

[259] Ibid., pp.218-219.

Christian feelings. He wanted a faith that works, free of the burden of debate and "intellectual subtlety." In this he was as opposed to dogmaticians as he was to critics. His splendid twitting of American fastidiousness in translation ("We do not mind, in this country, speaking of the deadness of Sarah's womb; but across the Atlantic they speak of that lady's incapacity for childbearing") indicates that Davidson had not lost his zeal for exact scholarship or his humour, but neither in this case was as important as the thing which most occupied his attention, the primacy of genuine religion.

Whatever of pedantry or fastidiousness or awkwardness the critical consciousness of a sceptical age was capable of introducing into a Bible designed for the heart, it was not capable, as Davidson saw it, of affecting the Book's great truths. "The several thousand emendations which they may introduce will touch nothing that is believed."[260] That was pretty much his opinion of the whole critical endeavour. What was the affect of 150 years of criticism of the Old Testament?, he asked in his last inaugural of 1899. The ideal person to make such as assessment would have to be someone "with all the modes of thought of fifty years ago suddenly confronted with all the conclusions of the new learning in their completeness." Such a person could see the differences and their effect. But even after the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual adjustment required of him to make the judgement, all he would be able to say is that, "so far as the doctrines of the faith are concerned, criticism has not touched them, cannot touch them, and they remain as they were."[261] Whether Isaiah had one or two authors, he argued, is not a matter of consequence for faith. "Such questions ought to be kept as far away as possible from all interferences with

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[260] Ibid., pp.220-221.

[261] Ibid., pp.304-305.

the articles of religion."

> And I wish to say that I think we ought to repudiate and resent the attempts that are made to make this question one of religious belief; and to endeavour so to place the question that it do not become so. [262]

It may be thought, as it has sometimes been suggested, that in these matters Davidson was less than completely forthright. Unlike his "somewhat rash and impetuous student" he lacked the courage of his convictions and was inclined rather to conceal the conclusions of his critical work from ordinary minds as he catered to their more traditional religious palates, leaving the confrontation of common faith and modern criticism to others. His talk of the need "so to place" critical questions that they do not become matters of faith could be taken as evidence for the prosecution. But once at least, in the strongest possible language and in the thick of the Robertson Smith case, he made it quite clear that even in the education of the young no critical difficulty should be evaded on the ground of danger to faith and principle.[263]

Davidson was not insensitive, however, to the way in which critical results might substantially affect simple religion. On the specific question of the identity of Isaiah's Suffering Servant he reckoned that "it would certainly be very misleading to ordinary minds, if we said that the servant of the Lord is the people of Israel."

> At the same time, we ought to feel under obligation, as interpreters of Scripture to others, to make some effort to explain what seems to us the prophet's own thought, and therefore the amount of truth he was commissioned to teach the people of God in his own age.[264]

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[262] Old Testament Prophecy, p.271.

[263] "Review of Works on Old Testament Exegesis in 1878", The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. XXVIII (1879), p.341.

[264] Old Testament Prophecy, p.467.

In other words one does not blurt out that "The prophet really knew nothing of Jesus of Nazareth" - not only because that would be "misleading" to those of a traditional persuasion, but because it is not exactly what Davidson himself believed. He believed that in this case Isaiah's words really did have a double meaning or double application, that they could not be interpreted exclusively in terms of the prophet's own understanding or exclusively in terms of the New Testament's, but had to be taken in terms of both. Davidson then is not to be thought of as a trimmer, skillfully tacking between critical opinion and popular sensibility. The attempt to explain a failure on his part to come "straight out with the truth" must consider, not only his disposition, but, on any particular issue, what, exactly, he believed the truth to be. But, as has been suggested, that was not always easy to determine, or at least when it was determinable, it was shot through with those fine distinctions which are inseparable from the art of great teaching.

Elmslie offered in defence of Davidson's "excessive reticence" that he may have simply chosen the better part, preferring the sweet meats of the sacred literature itself to the husks of the criticism of it. If he was unable to announce much that was either very positive or very startling, that may not have been his fault. "Possibly, having a taste for the poetry and religious genius of the Old Testament, he prefers a more succulent and nourishing diet."[265] He quoted Davidson's own provocative self-revelation in support.

> The critics are very fond of going into the prophet's workshop, and revealing to us the whole genesis of his great works. It is very pleasant to hear them talk, and to be told with certainty what suggested this touch,

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[265] The British Weekly, 30th January, 1902, p.419.

> and to whom is due the merit of first creating this other beautiful line or charming curve. And their conversation so corruscates with first principles that no guide is so entertaining as a good critic. There are persons dull or dreamy enough to feel bored by them, who are so intoxicated by the beauty of a great creation itself that they do not care a whit how it arose, and who prefer to stand in silence before it, drinking in what of its meaning they are able through their own natural untutored eyesight.[266]

It is not to be concluded that there was in Davidson's mind a cleavage between the devotional and the academic, however; we have been reminded that for him criticism was the handmaid of religion. In a review of one of Delitzsch's works he sympathetically characterised the two great aims of the author's life: "first, to find the true historical meaning of the Old Testament, and present it in a scientific manner; and, secondly, by this means to influence spiritually the life of men and confirm their faith." There may be something of autobiography in this. In Delitzsch's case anyway, Davidson saw how the two aims worked on one another, not perfectly but not without edification.

> It may be true that the great strength of the second purpose sometimes influences unconsciously the results of the first; but it was this purpose which gave the vital force to his works which so distinguishes them, and which, besides keeping his own mind fresh to the end, preserved his influence and power over his students and others, and kept his class-room crowded to the last.[267]

George Adam Smith amongst a host of other admirers paid handsome tribute to a similar influence of Davidson over his students. The connection between his spiritual power and his ability to quicken thought is not incidental. What some took to be diffidence or indecision may have been simply his commitment to criticism illumined by, but also swallowed up in, his commitment to faith. Smith tells us that Davidson committed himself to few of the new positions and was

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[266] Ibid. See also Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.170 for Strahan's corroboration.

[267] A review of Franz Delitzsch's Messianische Weissagungen in The Theological Review and Free Church Quarterly, vol. IV (1890), p.261.

always careful to present them to his students in equal balance with the old. But the point, eloquently made, is this:

> These things were more or less indifferent to him. His heart was below them in fellowship with God through the revealed word; and this, won as we saw through struggle in his youth, and sustained through all the critical movement which coincided with his career as a teacher, was his chief influence and his highest example to his generation.[268]

The Question Of Davidson's Critical Advance

There remain two issues to discuss, both very awkward but both related to Davidson's intellectual and religious make-up and thus to faith and criticism in A. B. D. One is Davidson's controversial role in the trial of William Robertson Smith. The other is the vexed question of how much and in what direction Davidson's views changed over the years.

Strahan was the most enthusiastic of Davidson's students and admirers in wanting to prove that his master's thought had kept up with critical advance. To the list of Davidson's writings which he compiled for The Expository Times he appended a recommendation of Taylor Innes' biographical introduction to The Called of God and George Adam Smith's fine reminiscence in The Biblical World, both for the treatment they gave to Davidson's teaching, "and also for tracing his critical development." The Smith essay does as advertised. Innes' portrait does not. Strahan seems to have recognised the fact by the time he came to write Davidson's life fifteen years later: "Dr. Taylor Innes's sketch of his life, excellent as far as it went, contained some errors, and was necessarily defective on certain sides, especially in reference to the Critical Movement."[269] Strahan may

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[268] "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 4, p.297.

[269] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p. ix.

have been speaking of the Critical Movement in general and not of Davidson's personal relationship to it; or between the time of The Expository Times essay and the biography he may have changed his mind. In any case the view expressed by Innes in The Called of God was not that expressed by Strahan in Chapter XIII of Andrew Bruce Davidson. The two views, in fact, represent the poles between which opinions of Davidson's development move.

Strahan wanted to show a steady advance, and one assumes that he meant in a direction which he regarded as "modern." Innes on the other hand believed that Davidson did not change, either in what he taught or in what he preached. Of the absence of change in Davidson's sermons he said:

> But in this, as in other matters, Davidson changed little, and remained qualis ab incepto. He held, indeed, like his forefathers, that a man's inception and shaping are not wholly on this side of time. But we have seen enough to assure us that the substance and drift of his preaching, as of his prelection from the chair, were matter also of early and persistent choice.[270]

Strahan has shown fairly conclusively, however, that on some issues Davidson definitely altered his opinion, on the dating of Psalms 2, 72, and 110, for instance, and certain aspects of Messianic prophecy.[271] He has also most helpfully pointed us to two early British and Foreign Evangelical Review articles (not listed in The Expository Times essay) in which Davidson adduced Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, a position from which he clearly retreated later.

In "The Recent Introductions to the Old Testament" (1861) Davidson firmly asserted his belief that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch and

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[270] The Called of God, p.57.

[271] Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.211ff.

grounded his belief in the testimony of Christ. In fact he spent over half of this review of thirty eight pages on the question and a more eloquent defence of Mosaic authorship could not be wished for, a glittering display of cut and thrust which would have warmed the hearts of even his most obstinate foes of a few years later. He showed from the Pentateuch itself that "Moses wrote Deuteronomy with his own hand."[272] From there he went on to prove "the essential unity of the Pentateuch", and thence to the "fair conclusion" that Moses was its author.[273] He had begun, however, with the question, "Has not the authority of Christ already met the discussion and ended it?", the conviction of some that "If Christ has delivered an unambiguous utterance on the dispute all investigations are useless and impertinent."[274] He showed himself eminently sensitive to all the nuances of complexity involved in the issue and was if anything more opposed to what he called "an unpleasantly lax way of citing this authority of Christ" than he was to a failure to submit to it.[275] In the end he came down squarely on the side of Christ's testimony - squarely but not superciliously or dogmatically. The article's and the argument's conclusion is worth quoting as an illustration of the type of thing Davidson was capable of at the outset of his career.

> The tradition that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, as it now stands, is one found in all subsequent Jewish writings, in all uncanonical writings, in all the writings of the contemporaries of our Lord. It was an element in the national faith in his days. He who spoke as never man spake gave it his sanction; in the language of all his countrymen he called Moses the author of the Pentateuch, and they meant that he was the author of all the Pentateuch. We cannot doubt the meaning of the Lord

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[272] "The Recent Introductions to the Old Testament", The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. X (1861), p.745.

[273] Ibid., pp.748-749.

[274] Ibid., p.739.

[275] Ibid., pp.739-740.

himself. To us it is plain and inevitable. And yet we will not shake the head at such men as Kurtz and Delitzsch, who think not our conclusion altogether warranted, who think that Christ spoke altogether out of relation to the faith of his contemporaries, and that his words need not imply more than that much, and the significant or legislative elements in the Pentateuch, are the work of Moses. We will not say to these men, We consider you impious, ye disavow the words of the Lord; we can only say, We think you wrong, Christ used the language of his contemporaries, and used it doubtless in their sense.[276]

Strahan could have cited this review as some of the best of Davidson, as well as simply evidence of a position from which he later moved. Davidson's remarks concerning hapax legomena - that they prove nothing or anything concerning the date of a book - are especially pungent.[277] One might well doubt whether Davidson would rather be forgotten than remembered by this particular exposition of "the errors of his youth."[278]

Little needs to be done to prove that on the question of Mosaic authorship Davidson changed his mind. In his article "Bible" in Chambers's Encyclopaedia, for instance, he declared that "it is scarcely to be supposed that the mass of minute and highly ritual ordinances in the Pentateuch came in their present form from Moses's hand."[279] Part of the proof that Davidson had altered his view on this subject is to be had, in fact, in the second early article to which Strahan points us in the biography. In "Recent Attacks on the Pentateuch - Davidson and Colenso", Davidson challenged Samuel Davidson and Colenso of Natal, but this time in defence of a partial Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. And while Strahan's purpose in citing it was to

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[276] Ibid., p.762.

[277] Ibid., p.749.

[278] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.201.

[279] "Bible", Chambers's Encyclopaedia, vol. II (1888), p.119.

present additional evidence that Davidson once held views from which he later departed, the article is itself proof of a departure, from Mosaic authorship of the entire Pentateuch to Mosaic authorship of part of it. In this second article too Davidson unflinchingly took up the question of Christ's testimony. Again he rested his case on it,but his case is not what it was two years earlier. Christ came to utter truth and truth alone, Davidson declared, and there was no error in Him, whether of word or life.

> And he says, Moses wrote of me; and thus, as matter of faith, it must be held, first, that Moses penned some parts of the Pentateuch, and that these related to Christ. Whether these were direct allusions to the Messiah, as those passages in Deuteronomy regarding the Prophet, or those in the section Balaam, expressly by the Talmud attributed to Moses; or whether the Lord refers to the indirect allusions to himself contained in the sacrificial system; or, perhaps, both, as is most probable; - in any case, we are bound to say Moses wrote of Christ. Second, Christ speaks generally of the Pentateuch under the name of Moses. He used in this respect no doubt, current human language. He nowhere says Moses wrote all the Pentateuch, as he says, He wrote of me. This current language can be justified if Moses wrote some part, or at least the chief part, if he was the most important writer of the five books, contributing the main elements of the legislation. In no other way could his name be fairly used as the author of the Pentateuch; and therefore, to this extent, at a stride, we go in the criticism of the Pentateuch. [280]

This article, like that of 1861, is throughout pretty much a "conservative statement." Amongst other things it asserts the absolute difference between the Bible and other national literatures and attacks certain of the methods and theories of "the most modern works on the Old Testament", certainly as employed by Davidson and Colenso.[281] And in the process of arguing for Christ's authority it deals interestingly, though not necessarily conservatively, with the question of the extent

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[280] "Recent Attacks on the Pentateuch - Davidson and Colenso", The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. XII (1863), p.391.

[281] Ibid., pp.386ff.

of Christ's knowledge.[282] It concludes with a general refutation of the documentary hypothesis.

In assessing these two early articles several things ought to be kept in mind. First, while they both represent more or less traditional views from which Davidson later departed, they also illustrate precisely the change Strahan was wanting to show. Second, both opinions are expressed in such an unobtrusive and general way that the difference between them is hardly noticed. The way in which the opinion of 1861 is put does not allow us to be shocked when we receive that of 1863. Third, his mature views on the same subject reveal a similar flexibility. While he unequivocally affirmed in the Chambers's article that the highly ritual ordinances in the Pentateuch could hardly have come from Moses's hand, his view was that they did not come "in their present form" from Moses's hand. Nor is there much comfort there for anyone wishing to ally him with what he referred to as "the prevailing view as to the Pentateuch", namely that which posited a post-prophetic date for Deuteronomy and assumed that "the ancient historical books have been edited from a Deuteronomistic point of view." Indeed this latter assumption Davidson regarded as the theory's weakness and his discussion of the theory leaves the reader in some considerable doubt as to whether he accepted it or not.[283] In other words there is almost as much hesitation in his exposition of the new in his mature writing as there is openness in his presentation of the old in his youthful writing. To put it more simply, there is about as much old in the late as there is new in the early.

The most troublesome plank in Strahan's platform is his assertion

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[282] Ibid., pp.389ff.

[283] "Bible", Chambers' Encyclopaedia, vol. II (1888), p.120.

that Davidson did not believe a theology of the Old Testament possible, only a history of the religion of Israel.[284] Strahan says that Davidson frequently used such language in later life, although he actually quotes only one instance. Nor is it absolutely clear what Strahan's point is, whether simply that Salmond should have called the volume of Davidson's lectures which he edited something other than The Theology of the Old Testament, or whether Davidson was gradually moving toward the conclusion that after all there really is no internal cohesion to the Old Testament revelation, or both. It appears from the context that Strahan is only suggesting that Salmond should have considered another title and format for the book. It may be, however, that something more fundamental is involved. For Davidson did in fact say that "A theology of the Old Testament is really an impossibility, because the Old Testament is not a homogeneous whole", and that "Instead of an Old Testament theology, the utmost that can be given is, a historical view of the religion of Israel; or, of the religion of Revelation during the Old Testament period."[285] It is a significant remark and might be taken as evidence that Davidson had abandoned the general conception that the Divine Revelation must be understood in terms of its coherence, later ideas in the Old Testament developing earlier ones and all finding their full expression in the New. But to prove that does not seem to be Strahan's intention, nor does Davidson's language make that interpretation mandatory. In fact Davidson's main point seems to be to discourage the imposition of a theological structure on Old Testament ideas apart from a thorough examination of their historical context, and

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[284] Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.216-217.

[285] A review of Alttestamentliche Theologie, edited by Professor Riehm, The Critical Review, vol. I (1891), p.29.

that, once again, was a point he made consistently throughout his life. He complained that Riehm's work was "too theological", i.e. did not give enough play to the events of history.[286] Davidson, however, did not disavow the growth of religious ideas in the Old Testament.[287] In any case the phrase "the religion of Revelation", taken together with an abundance of evidence that Davidson held to a progressively unfolding Revelation, suggests that the remark was not meant to be a reversal of anything he had said elsewhere and on any number of occasions.

When we come to the arguments of men other than Strahan we find the same sort of careful language as we find in Davidson himself. The most extended and best case in behalf of a critical development in Davidson is certainly that put forward by George Adam Smith. But even there the proof is hardly positive and Smith is always scrupulously honest about saying so. In fact Smith began his discussion of Davidson's development and the possibility that William Robertson Smith may have influenced him along more advanced lines by admitting that "Davidson's temperament and the lack of published material renders an exact appreciation impossible."[288] Smith mentions specifically "Graf's revolutionary proposals to assign first the priestly legislation, and then the priestly history, in the Pentateuch to the exilic or post exilic period." These proposals first made in 1866, were adopted and elaborated by Kuenen, Wellhausen, and an increasing number of scholars by 1870; and although he kept an open mind at first Robertson Smith afterward went over to the side of Graf in his Britannica articles and in his lectures on the Old Testament in

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[286] Ibid., p.33.

[287] Ibid., p.30.

[288] "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 3, p.175.

the Jewish Church. These facts are certain, Smith declares. "What is doubtful is the date of Davidson's approach to the new views as well as the extent of his adherence to them, and the degree to which he was drawn toward such adherence by the swifter convictions of his pupil."[289]

Davidson's published writings are not sufficient to answer the questions, Smith concedes, but he offers in proof of a change in Davidson's attitudes Henry Drummond's lecture notes from Davidson's class of 1870-71. From these it is clear that Davidson was discoursing on Pentateuchal criticism "with a leaning to the more conservative positions." Yet, after the Robertson Smith controversy broke out, Davidson dropped his lectures of the Pentateuch and did not resume the subject until nine years later. To the class to which he himself belonged (1876-77), Smith discloses, Davidson gave as a reason for confining their attention to the eighth-century prophets that "with these writings, at least, we were sure we were on historical ground." This alone, Smith argues, is evidence that his views were changing. The fact is corroborated, in Smith's opinion, by Davidson's reviews of Delitzch's Genesis and Dillman's Numbers, Deuteronomy and Joshua, contributed to The Theological Review and Free Church College Quarterly in 1888.

> In the first of these reviews Davidson inclines - one can hardly use a stronger word of any of his critical opinions - to an advanced position. He states the improbability of Moses having given one system of laws (Exod., Chaps. 20ff.) at Sinai and another so very different (Deuteronomy) on the plains of Moab; and the impossibility of conceiving of Deuteronomy as extant in the days of the judges and early monarchy.[290]

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[289] Ibid.

[290] Ibid., p.176.

Smith's argument is fair enough with regard to the first issue ("the improbability of Moses . . . .", etc; see pp.150-151 of the review of Delitzch) but Davidson's view of the second ("the impossibility of conceiving of Deuteronomy . . . .", etc.) is perhaps not so clear as Smith suggests. Davidson did not, for instance, use the word impossibility. In any case Smith has amply and legitimately covered himself by "inclines" and his candid comment on it. There is no need to remark on the review of Dillman because in fact Davidson did not write it.[291]

Smith offers further evidence of an advance in Davidson's views, however, by referring to Davidson's commentary on Ezekiel (1892) and by pointing out Davidson's observation that Ezekiel was familiar with a ritual law and that the sources of such a law must have been ancient. Davidson did not imply, Smith says, what Dillman maintained, that this was a written law, and still less did he imply that it was the Priestly Code.

> He leaves the date of the latter an open question; but appears to adhere - so far as the constitutional reserve of his mind allowed him to do so - to an exilic or post-exilic origin of the form in which we have this document. Yet he judged the bulk of its contents to be of a very early date, and to have come down through Israel's history by oral tradition.[292]

These positions Davidson took up after the Robertson Smith case was over, Smith argues, but whether he had reached them in earlier years, and how far Robertson Smith's arguments had moved him toward them, "are questions to which no certain answer can be given. All we can

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[291] The review was written not by Davidson but by W. Mackintosh Mackay. Strahan seems simply to have reproduced Smith's error as he too comments on the importance of this review in his Davidson bibliography (The Expository Times, vol. XV, p.452).

[292] Ibid., pp.176-177.

say is that he approached the same conclusions, with regard to the dates of the pentateuchal documents, more slowly than his pupil did."[293]

But surely the question to which no certain answer can be given is not when Davidson reached these opinions, but whether he reached them at all. Smith's own language ("appears to adhere") in citing the evidence is precisely what gives us pause in accepting his conclusions. Indeed the conclusion itself is hedged with considerable caution - "no certain answer", "all we can say." More qualifications are added in a final comparison of Davidson and Robertson Smith.

> But he was more careful, too, than the latter to point out the ancient character of many of the contents of even the latest of these documents, and thereby rendered an unmistakeable service to the development of critical theory. For nothing has produced more confusion, not to say panic, with regard to that theory than the failure to discriminate between the question of the dates of the documents of the Pentateuch and the dates of the origin of their contents. One or two years before his death he said to me that the older he grew the more he felt disposed to push back the latter to an early period.[294]

To complete the sketch of Davidson's critical development, Smith tells us that "he remained sceptical and even sarcastic of the finer distinction to which so many critics have carried literary analysis within the limits of the four main pentateuchal documents."[295]

The testimony of Andrew Harper of Sydney as given by Strahan presents the same indistinct picture. Harper assures us that Davidson's mind "was always moving forward on its own sane path" and that the editor of Davidson's manuscripts "was unable to arrange them so that the growth of his convictions might have been followed." In the same paragraph, in a tribute to Davidson's independence of mind, he speaks

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[293] Ibid. (Italics are Smith's).

[294] Ibid.

[295] Ibid.

of Davidson's response to many of the most popular and revolutionary critical theories: "He laid them aside with a quiet scorn, which was all the more scathing that it was hardly conscious." He took from them whatever grain of truth animated them, but the more flamboyant he regarded "with a puzzled astonishment, so completely did they seem to stand out of relation to the Old Testament facts on which they were supposed to be based."

> Consequently, though he recognised the greatness of scholars like Wellhausen, he was never affected by the Wellhausen or other orthodoxies which grew up in the critical schools. He could never have been regarded as "sound" by any of them.[296]

If Davidson did not accept Wellhausen or "other orthodoxies", what did he accept and what was the line of development of his thinking? Was it not Wellhausen (certainly it was Graf) to whom George Adam Smith had linked him in showing that during the later seventies he had stopped lecturing on the Pentateuch in order to confine his attention to the eighth-century prophets? And what are we to make of Davidson's remark quoted with a certain impatience by A. B. Bruce from the pages of The Critical Review?

> The criticism of the Pentateuch is a great historical drama which needs to be put upon the stage with appropriate scenery and circumstance. When performed by a company of prophets called J.E.D.P. with all their little ones down to J^3 and P^x it loses its impressiveness. It will not be strange if some spectators mistake the nature of the performance and go home with the impression that they have been witnessing a farce.[297]

In any case, if Harper is correct, more correct in detail than Smith, Davidson may very well belong to "that great Scottish triad who mark an epoch in this field of research by their ability to carry

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[296] Andrew Bruce Davidson, pp.113-114.

[297] "The Rev. A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. VIII (October 1896), p.262.

their contemporaries with them over the gulf that severs earlier 'pre-critical' Old Testament studies and the attitude and spirit that subsequently came to prevail", but he was not, like George Adam Smith, "a powerful exponent of the now ruling position in the literary criticism of the Old Testament which is commonly associated with the name of Wellhausen and dates from the seventies and eighties of the last century."

There can scarcely be a doubt that Davidson belonged to the scientific school of biblical interpretation. But the extent to which on major issues he rejected "the traditional position" or exactly which of the older formulations - in a word the precise direction along which his mind was always moving - is never quite clear, not even, it seems, to those who knew him best and most confidently assure us that it was. Perhaps what can be said is that there was in Davidson always the possibility of change but that that flexibility had its very definite limits. One is not taken totally by surprise by Davidson's change of view on the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, for instance, when one considers the conspicuously un-dogmatic manner in which he gave utterance to his earliest convictions and the not at all radical or even especially modern tone of his declaration of his later. Indeed within boundaries diligently patrolled by good sense, caution, perhaps even a phobic distrust of moving too quickly, one expects Davidson to change. But then the space available for change, under the conditions, is not very great. A. B. Davidson in a word was not T. K. Cheyne; he was not even Robertson Smith. The ground between the end and the beginning was well and truly and deeply turned, and always in a uniquely Davidsonian fashion. But he did not range far from it. He was not obsessed with the latter-day compulsion to "plow new ground." Or to alter the application of the metaphor, there was

always a certain amount of the old soil clinging, not unprotected either, to his own roots.

Davidson And The William Robertson Smith Case

George Adam Smith claimed that Davidson's role in the William Robertson Smith case was "undoubtedly the problem of Davidson's life."[298] Certainly a very great deal of the Davidson riddle is bound up in it. To say nothing about it therefore would constitute culpable neglect.

As everyone knows, Davidson remained silent throughout the entire five year course of an event in nineteenth-century Scotland every bit as important and as painful in its own way as the Disruption itself. Why did the master say nothing in behalf of his pupil, or indeed in behalf of anything? He may have been, as many thought, the one man who could have applied a healing balm to his deeply troubled Church.

There is no getting around it, it presents a dilemma which is more than merely interesting. It has moral dimensions that cry out for explanation. Drummond and Bulloch refer to it as one of two "unpleasant personal factors" in the Smith case (the other is Rainy's role)[299] and Carnegie Simpson thought that Davidson may have been "uncertain about duty or opinion."[300] Neither called Davidson a coward; indeed Simpson emphatically averred that "the suggestion that A. B. Davidson was a coward is one I decline even to discuss."[301] Rainy's biographer has, however, albeit parenthetically and with a sigh of resignation, offered several other explanations of the

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[298] "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 3, p.174.

[299] The Church in Late Victorian Scotland 1874-1900, p.77.

[300] The Life of Principal Rainy, vol. I, p.355.

[301] Ibid.

bewildering silence - "the sensitive scholar's shrinking from the din of the ecclesiastical arena, or a Hamlet-like irresolution, or an Ecclesiastes-like feeling (to use one of his own startling phrases) of 'the resultlessness of all struggle for knowledge', or a temperamental self-distrust and diffidence, or whatever else."[302]

These are perceptive comments. Especially perceptive perhaps is the reference to the "Ecclesiastes-like feeling", although George Adam Smith, not Simpson, was in fact the first to comment on it. Smith too had scorned as unthinkable the notion that Davidson was timid and has spoken in an apt phrase of "the constitutional incapacity which he showed for public debate which was not cowardice."[303] Everyone agreed that Davidson "cultivates the shade." John Watson exaggerated but made the point when he claimed that "No one ever heard of his attending a public meeting or moving a resolution, and added that Davidson "would rather any day have been silent than speak, and would have given his year's stipend rather than mount a public platform."[304]

All of this is true and all of a perfect piece with the picture built up of Davidson the sensitive scholar "shrinking from the din of the ecclesiastical arena." Strahan took issue with Simpson on this score,however. At least, Strahan argued, if Davidson shrank from the arena, it was not <u>simply</u> because he was temperamentally diffident, as Strahan agreed that he was. Indeed his self-effacement, Strahan reminds us, was one of his charms. But to explain what suggests itself as a lack of moral resolve in terms of a personality trait is not good enough. Nor, Strahan believed, would Davidson have thought so. Strahan proffered better reasons.

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[302] <u>Ibid</u>.

[303] "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", <u>The Biblical World</u>, vol. XX, No. 3, pp.174-175.

[304] <u>The British Weekly</u>, 30th January, 1902, p.409.

The first was Davidson's physical constitution. He had been all his life of indifferent health and anyone who knew him would agree that five years of Robertson Smith Case strain "would have shortened his days, and even a little of it might have killed him outright."[305] Strahan of course did not rest his defence on Davidson's health - "I lay little stress on this" - but it is a consideration that is perhaps too often overlooked by commentators who themselves know very little of the almost unbearable physical trauma that can accompany even the slightest output of nervous energy, especially on matters which are of the deepest personal import. Innes tells us that that was one of the reasons Davidson so disliked preaching. The strain was bodily and nervous. But more than that it was emotional: "It ran down, I think, to a contrast in his inner nature, which sometimes grew to extreme conflict or tension."[306] And here Innes has perhaps seen further than Strahan. The physical pain was related in no insignificant way to the deepest motions of a soul in which there was still "something enigmatic and unresolved."

Shyness, self-distrust, "Hamlet-like irresolution", in a word, all the features of Davidson's very person - these explain Davidson's silence in the Robertson Smith Case. Add to them the very real threat of very real bodily injury to which Strahan quite properly alludes, plus the further insight granted by Innes that even that was rooted in something in his being which was so much a part of his essential self that he could not overcome it, and you have an answer and a defence.

Strahan, though, contends that the best answer is none of these, or rather it is all of these and one better, namely an honest conviction

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[305] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.234.

[306] The Called of God, p.41.

on Davidson's part that he could best serve his Church as he did. But from that we must turn for a moment as we have said nothing yet about the bare facts of Davidson's conduct in the proceedings. How, for instance, did he vote in the General Assembly?

For a start Davidson was not a member of the General Assembly three out out of five years in which a vote on the Smith Case was taken, and two out of the three in which he was absent, 1880 and 1881, were the final and critical years. He was not present in 1878 either. In 1877 Davidson voted for J. S. Candlish's motion to "leave the case in the hands of the Presbytery to take its course." Candlish's motion, however, fell (491-113) before Dr. Wilson's to suspend Smith temporarily from his duties at Aberdeen while a libel was prepared against him.[307] In 1879 Davidson voted for Rainy's motion to appoint a committee before proceeding further with the now-framed libel "to confer with Professor Smith, directing them to consider the case in all its bearings, with the view of ascertaining the best means of arriving at a result honouring to the truth of God, and fitted to secure, as far as can be, all the weighty interests which are at stake, . . ."[308] Rainy's motion also lost, by a single vote (321-320), to that of the prosecution to order the Aberdeen Presbytery a third time to try the case. Thus in both the years during which he participated in the General Assembly debates over Robertson Smith, Davidson voted for

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[307] Candlish's motion recognised the bearing of Smith's views on the question of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. "But in view of the great importance and difficulty of the whole subject, and the desirableness that the mind of the Church, when finally expressed, should be such as to do justice to all interests involved, and to satisfy the claims alike of faith and of biblical science, the General Assembly deem it expedient to pronounce no opinion at this stage on the College Committee's report, or on any point connected with the case." Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1877, p.102.

[308] Proceedings and Debates of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, 1879, p.101.

caution, for putting off discussion, for waiting until more evidence was in or until the case could be considered in its wider bearings. In view of his approach to almost every issue, critical questions not least, his behaviour is not surprising. No doubt he would have infinitely preferred, as he did with the revision of the Bible on which he was even then working, that the matter could have been delayed "till this fever of critical discussion had somewhat abated." Above all he would have preferred that it had never been raised.[309]

But other than the two votes for moderation and tolerance, what was the extent of Davidson's participation? Black and Chrystal make it plain that Davidson was clearly behind Smith, inasmuch as he wished Smith's success, counselled him, and on at least one occasion took up his pen to rebuke those who had misjudged Smith and his views, either out of malice or incompetence.[310] Nor is there any hint in the Life that Smith's biographers ever felt that Davidson had not done enough in their subject's behalf. In fact their last reference to Davidson is a commendation: they quote him in tribute to Smith's genius.[311]

Davidson's support of Smith, however, was almost entirely passive. George Adam Smith says that "Beyond recording a silent vote now and

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[309]That in fact is what Davidson expressed in a note to Smith following the publication of Smith's self-defence in the Daily Review of 21st June, 1876. After counselling Smith about what he might add to his statement to the press following the storm it had raised, Davidson added, "It would be a great gain to be able to devote ourselves to our quiet pursuits of study without fearing the rising of a tempest which might rage for a lifetime." Black and Chrystal, The Life of William Robertson Smith, pp.199-200.

[310]Ibid., p.216.

[311]Ibid., p.564.

again, and putting in as silent an appearance at the meetings of Smith's supporters, he took no public part in the movement."[312] One could wish that Smith had been more specific - which meetings?, for instance - but his statement nevertheless tends to confirm that Davidson's silence is a fact. One might also want to query Smith concerning the larger point which he was making here, namely that the cause which the Robertson Smith trial vindicated, was for Davidson the "triumph of his influence." But here we may return to Strahan's defence of Davidson.

Strahan believed that Davidson's silence could never be attributed to a lack of resolve. Neither was it simply to be ascribed to his disposition, or even the better cause, a concern for a genuinely serious matter of physical health. He believed rather that Davidson, before God, took his role to be different from Smith's, as different as were their vastly different personalities. More than that, even though Davidson and Smith were, in the long, after the same result, namely to educate their Church in the principles of historical criticism, Davidson saw from the beginning that Smith's methods were ill-considered. Davidson, Strahan claimed, "was probably the greatest Scottish teacher of last century."

> And when he saw his best pupil, himself now a teacher, seeking to force critical methods upon an unenlightened and unconvinced Church, attempting to convert a great Christian democracy with law, logic, libels, brilliant dialectic and splendid scorn, his instinct told him that all this was gravely wrong.[313]

Davidson "had the immense advantage - like his Lord - of being sprung from the people" and thus he sympathised with what they were capable of and what they were ignorant of. He knew too that teaching was best done gently and in love.

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[312] "The Late Professor A. B. Davidson", The Biblical World, vol. XX, No. 3, p.174.

[313] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.240.

> Thus while Smith kept saying Il faut de l'audace and such like things, Davidson knew well enough that though fighting with laws and libels and scorn might be magnificent - and in this instance was very magnificent - it was war, and the servant of the Lord need not fight with his brethren and his Mother Church. For he can educate them - a very different thing.[314]

In the end Strahan did not blame Smith, but rather the Church's use of him.[315] Still, and even though as Strahan believed, the Smith affair was "much ado about nothing",[316] Smith had proceeded ill-advisedly, and Davidson again had chosen the better part.

Strahan's is a defence well managed. It is eloquent besides. And no doubt it has cast more light on Davidson's soul, "fervent and almost feminine", as Innes described it, unwilling to hurt, preferring rather to be misunderstood than to fight, and always endeavouring to put people before principles. Davidson's then was a Christian silence; in enduring whatever censure he did, he was, in his own way and no less than Smith himself, martyr as well as pioneer.

The negative side of an image thus impressed will already have suggested itself; and nowhere is the contrast between various kinds of courage, nor the complexities of which they are compounded, so strikingly fixed as in a remark which Robertson Smith made to Alexander Whyte at the outset of the controversy. In a letter of January 1876 Smith wrote, "I wish Davidson would come forward now - not for my sake but for his own. He has passive courage - i.e. if I were turned out he would resign. But courage to commit suicide as Black calls it is not what will help the church."[317] Not even William Robertson Smith doubted Davidson's courage. His remark simply points up again the

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[314] Ibid., p.244.

[315] Ibid., p.247.

[316] Ibid., p.250.

[317] C.84 in the William Robertson Smith Collection, The University Library, Cambridge University.

almost unbelievable difference between the pupil and his teacher.

Between Strahan and Innes and George Adam Smith, and a host of others who would readily come to Davidson's aid in this or in any other controversy, enough has been said from the side of psychological analysis and spiritual biography. There is another side which perhaps merits consideration.

Every attempt to explain Davidson's role in the Smith case assumes that Davidson's views were the same as Smith's. That is after all what draws the question and goads us for an answer. If Davidson really believed what Smith believed, in fact taught Smith what to believe, then on what grounds could he justifiably say nothing in the time of Smith's greatest peril? Moreover why was Davidson not impeached? The second question has been answered in part already and need not be addressed again; nonetheless the questions are not unrelated. Drummond and Bulloch, for instance, concluded that it may be seen from Davidson's posthumously published books that "the mind of the master was identical with that of the student. He wrote in Chambers's Encyclopaedia more or less what Smith wrote in Britannica, and yet remained immune."[318]

Apart from Strahan's contention that the posthumously published books revealed very little of the mind of the master, or at least revealed it very poorly, the comparison of Davidson's "Bible" and Smith's is not entirely cogent. Davidson's article was written in 1888, seven years after the close of the Smith case and thirteen years after the publication of Smith's Britannica piece. By that time the church may have deemed the burden of Davidson too heavy or too dreary

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[318] Drummond and Bulloch, The Church in Late Victorian Scotland 1874-1900, p.77.

to take up. But "more or less" is the significant phrase and precisely the point. The tone of Davidson's article is conspicuously, even radically different from that of Smith's, for one thing, and that may reflect more than a simple difference in the way they expressed themselves.

It is not intended to bring Drummond and Bulloch's comment under any special fire. They are simply a good and recent illustration of an assumption that may need a more careful look, namely the assumption that Davidson's and Smith's views were the same. What Davidson thought, as suggested earlier, may not be what or as much as it is often presumed to be, and a more exact delineation of his views may offer some insight into his silence. Or it may only show again that his position on many topics is not easy to determine - which compounds the risk of saying that his views were identical to Smith's. Moreover the question of Davidson's silence is not simply that he never said anything in public. It is that he never wrote anything either, not about Smith's views on specific subjects, or his own, or the thing about which he might have had the finest and most useful opinion, the relationship between faith and criticism in his Church in his day.

But of course it is not quite true that Davidson wrote nothing during the Smith case. He did write that article from "the Smith side" which Candlish had asked him for in 1879 and for which he himself nearly came to grief in 1880, the year Smith's first trial ended. It therefore must not be left out of his defence. And significantly it contains some of the most straightforward language he ever used, both in regard to his views on specific issues and the promulgation of critical scholarship generally.

A good deal of the article concerned itself with a pamphlet by Principal Douglas of the Free Church College, Glasgow, on "Why I Still Believe That Moses Wrote Deuteronomy." Davidson found Douglas's arguments "inconclusive" and used the pamphlet as a kind of spring-board from which to launch a discussion of a whole range of questions connected with the Pentateuch and the criticism of it. In his remarks he showed himself sympathetic, if not to the solutions advanced by the critics, certainly to the seriousness of their questions, and not least those concerning the revision of Israel's history and the dating of Deuteronomy, the very issue on which Smith's indictment was finally fixed.[319]

After nicely laying out and explaining the conception which lies at the heart of critical scholarship, "which has taken firm hold of the critical mind", namely that "the legislation of Israel, like all parts of the thought and theology of the Bible is organically connected with the life of Israel and is not the production of one period of the people's history", Davidson went on to address the question of how it ought to be received. He had not committed himself to the modern conception - in elucidating it he saw fit to include a parenthetical "whether it be true or false" - but he freely acknowledged its cogency and proposed to face it squarely.

One of the questions that had to be faced was whether the critical view was true. That, Davidson replied, is a complicated question and can only be answered along the lines that brought the view into being in the first place. The other question was, "How may we bear ourselves towards such a criticism in the meantime"? His answer

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[319] "Review of Works on Old Testament Exegesis in 1878", The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. XXVIII (1879) pp.349-352.

to that runs, broadly, along two lines. First, the organic or developmental view of Old Testament history and religion "cannot touch the essence of the Biblical religion, however much it may alter our hereditary conceptions of history."[320] Second, as to the bearing of critical questions on Scripture "(if we might venture to distinguish between the question of religion and that of Scripture)", that question, he said, in the end "is not one about the reality of Revelation, but about the way of Revelation - not whether a revelation came from God, but about the manner in which it came, and how the human mind entered into the fellowship of the Divine mind in shaping it."[321] We are now beyond the maxim enunciated by Spanheim (in his Historia Jobi) two hundred years ago, said Davidson, that whatever seems history and is not, can only be fraud of the writer, and "a dogmatic difference between the case of Job and that of Deuteronomy cannot be verified to the mind. The difference of fact is that we are more accustomed to dramatic poetry."[322]

The concluding pages of Davidson's article offer the strongest meat, however, and they concern the largest and most profound issues of the philosophy or theology of history. If we are to look anywhere for Davidson's defence of Smith and his counsel to his Church it is here. Dr. Douglas had apparently simply dismissed the whole critical movement, had considered it a kind of irrelevency without meaning for the Church or for mankind. "This is a view hard to take", Davidson replied. "A great intellectual movement can hardly be conceived so completely abandoned by the spirit of truth, and carrying on its

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[320] Ibid., p.358.

[321] Ibid., p.360.

[322] Ibid.

operations so entirely outside the region where God himself is present as the source of all true advancement, as this view implies." And after generously expressing an understanding of Douglas's distrust of the religious attitudes of some of the leaders of the critical movement, Davidson reminded him that there are nonetheless men in it, some whose opinions on general religious subjects differed little from his own, such as Kurtz and Riehm and Delitzsch, as well as some whose views were widely divergent from them. And we must not estimate the value of a general movement of mind according to too strict a scrutiny of individuals. Humanity advances in a mass, and the individuals whom it thrusts forward to clear the way for it must be estimated in relation to the whole, not separately. There are non-Christian as well as Christian physicists and we accept the results of both as parts of the rich conquests won by mankind. Even if we hear of the best of them what to our minds may seem unhopeful, this does not throw doubt upon their achievements, "it only deepens our sense of the mystery of the connection between the individual and the whole, and reminds us that our judgement is not final, and that we shall also be judged."[323] Applied to the critical study of Scripture, perhaps especially the Pentateuch, this means that divergent theories and varieties of opinion, no matter how strange or perversely conceived, are not the evidence that the whole movement is a house divided. A steady and clearly perceptible advance has been made to the present state. The "brilliant conjecture of Astruc" regarding the divine names in Genesis, for instance, "has never been subjected to question", and the position taken up by De Wette that Deuteronomy is an independent book and that it is post-Mosaic, "has been regarded

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[323] Ibid., pp.361-362.

as almost axiomatic since his day."[324]

But what of the thing which men seemed to be most apprehensive about, the thing which perhaps more than any other single issue brought Smith's downfall? Granted that all this was true for men of theological training, even laymen of spiritual discernment and experience, what of the young? On this too, Davidson was never more forthright. Scotland and England were vying with one another, he claimed, in "the very praiseworthy effort to make the newest results of Biblical learning a prominent element in the education of the young."[325] "On one thing we are clear, that no critical difficulty should be evaded on the ground of danger to youthful faith and principle. The time for evasion in the education of youth is over."[326]

In this extraordinarily forceful language Davidson addressed the largest and most important of the issues in the Smith debate and in the whole critical crisis. Is the critical movement worthwhile? Can it be justified? Indeed, given the divine ordering of history, is it ever proper to think that it could be rejected out of hand? Must we not in any case keep it from the young? To the first two questions Davidson answered boldly in the affirmative; to the second two, just as boldly in the negative.

It is not insignificant that whatever charges were brought against Davidson should have grown out of this article written for "the Smith side." There is bite enough in it to make itself felt. At the same time it is no less significant that nothing much came of the charges; for here, as throughout his career, Davidson was as elusive as he was incisive. For while he argued that the critical

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[324] Ibid., p.362.

[325] Ibid., p.340.

[326] Ibid., p.341.

movement has made obvious and undeniable progress and that no great intellectual movement can have been completely abandoned by the spirit of truth, he very rarely, if ever in so many words, committed himself to any of its formulations, certainly not in a way which would make them unequivocally his own or legally impeachable.

Davidson was not guilty of complete silence in the Robertson Smith crisis. In the very midst of it he spoke out clearly and convincingly on some of the most fundamental issues confronting his generation. Moreover it was the only occasion on which he addressed some of them in quite this way. But the form of his comments - embedded in a scholarly review - left them practically ineffective. Davidson did not write a "Review of Issues Now Before the Church", or, in the Douglas manner, "Why I Do Not Still Believe Moses Wrote Deuteronomy", or even, "The Present Crisis: Some Thoughts." He wrote "Review of Works on Old Testament Exegesis in 1878." Likewise the content of the article. Although on many specific critical topics his views were more strongly put than in anything he ever wrote before or after, it is still not clear to what extent he agreed with Smith and therefore was actually defending him or his position. Strahan refers to the review as Davidson's "celebrated article", but can do no more than cite Black and Chrystal's guarded observation that "It is clear, although he does not say it in so many words, that the scholarly reviewer disbelieved in the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy."[327] Rainy, Davidson's advocate in his own case, was not wrong when, the day after Smith's aquittal, he conceded that Davidson's article had been written by someone who "had the current

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[327] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.236.

discussions in view." What is noteworthy is that it could be put no stronger than that. Even Davidson's prosecutor found his guilt only in the fact that in the review he had published theories the results of which he would neither justify nor condemn. One cannot help but feel that after all the explanations are in, including the sharpest delineation of his views that is possible, Davidson's role in the Robertson Smith case remains the problem of his life.

Conclusion

The image of Davidson's critical position which comes most readily to the mind is that of an impressionist painting. At an appropriate distance the outlines of the figures or the landscape are easily discernible. There is a grove, there is a house, there a man walking a lane. But as one moves closer one sees that the whole is really a vast composite of dots, not definite strokes of which it can be said, this is certainly the branch of a tree or the sleeve of a coat or the brick of a chimney and nothing else. In other words it is possible to say of Davidson that in general he held to certain positions, but when we begin to examine his <u>exact</u> views we are not so sure that individually they support our broader impression. On the specific issue of Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy, for instance, Davidson declared that it is scarcely to be supposed that the minute and highly developed ritual ordinances in the Pentateuch came from Moses's hand; but the statement is not complete without the significant clause, "in their present form." Did Davidson believe that Moses wrote Deuteronomy? In a general way the answer is no - but only in a general way. Other examples have already been cited; but much of the impressionism is better illustrated by the frequency with which Davidson, in discussing

some conclusion or theory, used the phrase "whether it be true or false."

But perhaps the image of the impressionist painting is best used otherwise. Perhaps it is not the over-all theme that is clear in Davidson but rather the individual applications of the brush. Strahan after all warned us that Davidson's bête noire was a generality. In casting about for a way to characterise Davidson we may want to say that the thing that gives the appearance of vagueness or ambiguity to his views is precisely the exacting precision of their statement. No possible qualifier is neglected, no loose end left running adrift. It is not then that he was merely "impressionistic." On the contrary, he was simply aware to an extraordinarily high degree that no issue is uncomplicated, and that if scholarship is to be of any service at all it must point that out.

Some things of course can be said with certainty. One is that Davidson believed in a scientific or inductive, i.e. a non-dogmatic approach to Holy Scripture. Another is that he believed that its revelation could be understood only when it was seen in the light of a development or progress of Revelation. Above all and perhaps most importantly he believed that it ought to be read, not only with a keen regard for its literary form and historical context, but, what is a different thing, for its own sake, with a single eye to the purpose for which it was written, namely, "to enable men to live unto God." In this connection we can hardly forget his fear that the Bible might become an intellectual book, nor Elmslie's pungent comment that in contrast to the tedious tinkering and the "remorseless manner" (as Davidson himself once characterised the method of Wellhausen) of some of the more rigorous critics of Scripture,

Davidson preferred the Book itself - all of which adds up to the impression, made on not a few (A. B. Bruce was the most outspoken about it) that Davidson did not take the critical movement altogether seriously, even though all would have agreed that in Scotland at least he was its founder.

The best explanation for the apparent fluidity or flexibility, or even indecisiveness, of Davidson's opinions on particular topics and the critical movement as a whole, however, is surely that given by George Adam Smith, namely that between faith and criticism there was, for Davidson, no possible choice to be made. Although Davidson was explicit about his conviction that the results of criticism had not touched and could not touch the central issues of an experiential faith, or for that matter the central historical facts upon which it rested, there is reason to believe that if ever he discovered that faith and criticism were incompatible, he would have taken the faith and left the criticism. In Smith's felicitous language, the things of criticism were more or less indifferent to him: "His heart was below them in fellowship with God through the revealed word."

This helps account too for what might appear to be a fault or a failure in Davidson, namely the lack of a theological statement concerning the relationship between faith and criticism. What is the epistemological link, for instance (as we asked of Robertson Smith), between faith which is essentially experiential and the Bible which is essentially historical? It is a question which he did not address. He was a superb theologian. But he did not "do theology" in anything like a conscious or formal or official way; and his lectures on the theology of the Old Testament are a statement of its theology,

not of his own. He disliked metaphysics, Innes claimed - "His distrust of philosophy and its methods lasted to the end and was often sarcastically expressed."[328] And Strahan, who has portrayed "The Critic", "The Grammarian", "The Preacher", etc., has given us no chapter of "The Theologian." "In good sooth", Elmslie wrote, "we are not sure that our Professor occupies himself much with abstract questions."[329] Indeed one wonders how phrases like "epistemological link" would have appealed to him!

Davidson had a fine philosophic ability, nonetheless, and it is not insignificant that Robertson Smith named him first in his list of theologians who had most influenced him, in company with Rothe, Ewald and Ritschl.[330] But it was a gift, an aspect of his nature rather more than anything he worked at or even regarded. One reviewer of his posthumous Biblical and Literary Essays likened him to Montaigne in this and remarked: "Dr. Davidson was one of the happily constituted minds, who get all the results of philosophic thinking without any of the logical apparatus by which philosophers daunt us."[331] Still, he too rarely indulged in theological speculation and so provided us with few of those inter-connections for which we might wish, if only so as to have his own very individual slant on them.

Yet it would be untrue to say that Davidson never indulged in theological speculation. From one point of view it may be said that that is what he always did; and the reason he so rarely gave answers

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[328] The Called of God, p.15.

[329] The British Weekly, 30th January, 1902, p.419.

[330] Black and Chrystal, The Life of William Robertson Smith, p.534.

[331] The Union Magazine, vol. III (1903), p.138.

to questions was that his mind was continually occupied with questions that could not be answered, or could not be answered by the simple acquisition of data or by further research. The topics that seemed to claim his attention were those such as the nature of prophetic inspiration or the nature of prophetic fulfilment. In discussing these he was at his best, offering insights which are not matched by any of his contemporaries. And in Job and Ecclesiastes he was offered scope for the play of his mind on the profoundest theological issues. It was as if he could not be content merely to discover whether Moses wrote Deuteronomy, or Isaiah all of the prophecy attributed to him, when the deeper things remained un-settled. The frequency with which Davidson gave answers, or failed to give answers, must be measured against the magnitude of the questions he was asking.

Davidson's genius was in lighting up the inside of a question, pointing out where one might safely go and where things were yet in darkness. He could almost always spot where a critic had gone astray or bring an issue back into balance by that "strange power of seeing both sides of a question." It is this that gives his reviews their charm and even excitement. He was a master at seeing what a thing was not, and why. In giving answers there is not the same sharpness, and readers grow weary, some with too many "perhapses"[332] and others with his failure either to justify or condemn the theories he had reviewed. Thus the exhilaration and yet the tediousness of his work.

But Davidson, as has been implied in almost everything ever written about him, is explained best in terms of his personality, or better, his soul. And with that we may end.

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[332] In reply to Carnegie Simpson's complaint that Davidson's "Review of Works on Old Testament Exegesis in 1878" was "non-committal", Strahan conceded that "it contains some 'perhapses'." Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.206.

For Davidson it never seemed to be a matter simply of particular "views" - of the Bible, or of Criticism, or even of faith. It was much more than that, more a question of his whole relationship to his times and indeed to all of life, reflected in what seems a kind of undecidedness about whether or not the universe was friendly. Toward the end of his life, in his charge to Professor Martin, Davidson spoke at some length on the science of Apologetics in the present climate of opinion. He had some idea, he declared, what Apologetics used to be, but not much of what it is. A certain change, he supposed, had taken place in Apologetics "as in other religious sciences." Formerly Scripture was set over against the general thought of mankind, revelation over against reason, and the Christian faith against the religions of the world, and the relation between the two sets of things was conceived to be one of antagonism. To some extent a different view now prevails, he said. It is felt that God has not left Himself anywhere without a witness, and that the human mind is fundamentally sincere and in following its bent after truth it has accomplished something. These results of the general mind of man are no longer looked at as antagonistic to the Christian faith, but as in affinity with it.[333]

This is not to be taken as necessarily Davidson's own personal view of the world. He was, again, only rehearsing what now "it is felt." And one suspects that on some of these issues he may have strongly dissented and taken a line much more like Martin's own.[334]

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[333] Charge delivered to the Rev. Alexander Martin at Martin's inauguration as Professor of Apologetics and Pastoral Theology at New College, 20th October, 1897, pp.55-57.

[334] Martin's speech, "The Problem of Apologetic", is itself an excellent analysis of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, which he referred to as an "Age of Criticism", and to whose problems he addressed, in a not un-Davidsonian style, the solution of the Person of Jesus Christ, verified by the proven historicity of the documents in which He is presented to us and by our experience of Him. Ibid., pp.40ff.

Still there are some things here that bear a resemblence to remarks in the 1879 "Review of Works of Old Testament Exegesis." No great movement of mankind is completely bereft of the spirit of truth he said then. He seemed to be affirming something of the same here, indicating that maybe during his last twenty five years, at least on certain occasions, he thought that the answer to the question of the general benignancy of his times might be yes.

But over against that must be placed all those comments made in lectures and sermons which spoke in less respectful language of the "Critical Spirit" of the times, that spirit which "is more unlike than any other to the spirit of the Scriptures", and of our "godless age" of science whose glory it is to "banish faith out of its own sphere." In other words there is no certain assurance given anywhere that he had received a soul-satisfying answer to the astonishing and soul-searching question he had put to a friend in a letter of 1865: "Is this spirit of the age really the tumultuous many-sided movement of God in history? or is it the spirit of Antichrist, of whom we have heard that he should come?"[335] It was a remarkable letter in many ways, especially perhaps in its description, in reference to his own times, of what "people who use large words call a 'transition' state - as if the world, or nature, or man (or God?) could be in any other."[336] Its most striking feature, however, is the self-revelation he included in the answer to his own astonishing question:

> The Christian Churches here go in unanimously with the latter view; many thoughtful Christian men who venture to speak, pronounce for the former. Happy seem to me those who take either side, and only miserable and paralytic are those who halt between the two. I own

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[335] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.103.

[336] Ibid., p.102.

> to one of the sick folk waiting at the pool in the
> vain hope that some angel will trouble the waters;
> I dislike the old, I distrust the new.[337]

The confession does not quickly fade from the memory. It seems so much of the same hue as the fragile mosaic of his life and thought. The friend to whom Davidson was confiding later averred that "I am sure he never fell a prey to a sceptical mind, that heritage of woe."[338] But the phrase was Davidson's own and the context in which it was originally given indicates that it may have borne the marks of autobiography.[339] Davidson, the friend concluded, felt himself called to bridge the gap between the extremes of the old which he considered effete or untenable and the uncertain theories of the new which he considered were going too far and too fast.[340] Whether or not Davidson would have seen himself in that strategic role, or admitted it if he had, he felt as perhaps few men of his times the burden which it carried. It is not easy to say if his scepticism best suited him for his times - or indeed if, as is more likely the case, the burden did not rather compound the scepticism. But if Davidson's master John Duncan was a philosophical sceptic who took refuge in theology, it is probably not far off to say with Taylor Innes that Davidson was a born sceptic who took refuge in God.[341]

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[337] Ibid., pp.103-104.

[338] Ibid., p.107.

[339] In a sermon on the Apostle Thomas, Davidson said "Nor was he possessed of that heritage of woe, a sceptical mind." The Called of God, p.324. Innes claims that Davidson, "among his friends the most unautobiographical of men, seems to have found occasional relief in confiding aspects of his private life to a whole congregation, which he knew would be unable to recognise them." Ibid., pp.5-6.

[340] Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.108.

[341] The Called of God, p.49.

Note On The Editing Of Old Testament Prophecy

J. A. Paterson's editing of Old Testament Prophecy has become notorious. In one contemporary review it was remarked that "upon the lines on which he has chosen to work, Professor Paterson has done his work well. Perhaps he might have done better."[1] A mild censure compared to the recent judgement that "Old Testament Prophecy, Edinburgh 1904, is at best an editorial disaster, at worst an editorial crime, for which Davidson's successor, J. A. Paterson was responsible."[2]

Fortunately for the subject of prophecy and Davidson's ideas on it there is besides the edited lectures the excellent article in Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible.[3] It was one of the last articles, if not the last, that Davidson ever wrote and thus must surely represent his mature views. Interestingly one of the first articles Davidson wrote was also on prophecy, "The Prophets", for The Family Treasury in 1870. By examining these first and last articles and the lectures which cover the whole of his career, it should be possible to come to some conclusion about the general usefulness of the lectures as edited. Admittedly the differences between the piece done for Treasury and that for Hastings' will be considerable. Not only were they separated by over thirty years, which would be reflected in their respective styles, but they were written for journals which were vastly different in purpose and clientele. But the same might

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[1] J. A. Selbie in The Expository Times vol. XV (October 1903-September 1904), p.207.

[2] G. W. Anderson, "Two Scottish Semitists", Presidential Address to the Eighth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, in Congress Volume, 1974 (Supplements to VETUS TESTAMENTUM, Vol. XXVIII), p.xvii.

[3] "Prophecy and Prophets", Hastings's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. IV, pp.106-127.

be said of the comparison of Prophecy with the Dictionary article. Some comparison can be made, nonetheless, and it may be possible to show that between the three no great differences of real substance exist.

The salient feature of the Treasury article is its lack of discussion of specific Old Testament problems of a critical sort. It really has to do with prophecy in general, Strahan's dissent notwithstanding.[4] And whether or not it is considered a reflection of Davidson's "early" views or his "late" ones, it is consciously non-traditional and typical of Davidson throughout his career.

The article begins with a definition of prophet. This is followed by a long digression on what Davidson calls the "natural" theories of prophecy, especially those which emphasise that, really, all men are meant and fitted to discover "eternal thoughts", although it is the prophets who give them utterance. Familiar enough to modern readers, these theories are nicely characterised by Davidson, as is the general constellation of ideas to which they belonged in his day.[5]

Davidson's sketch indicates that he was well in tune with the spirit of his times. More important is his attempt to suggest what is or ought to be the relationship between such theories and "the view commonly held in the churches." He considered that it was not easy to say how near the former approached the latter but that the two did have some common ground and that the way sometimes adopted, "of

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[4]Of Davidson's "habits of mind", Strahan said: "He would have poured scorn on 'prophecy in general.' His bête noire was a generality." The Expository Times, vol. XV, p.454.

[5]A. B. Davidson, "The Prophets", The Family Treasury (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1870), pp.16-17.

repudiating everything which does not come up to a fixed standard, and taking nothing unless we can get all from men", was not wise.

> Rather, if men will go a mile with us, let us thank them for their good company so far, and not upbraid them because they refuse to go with us twain. Certainly at parting we shall tell them they had better come on. But if they will not, we shall say it is well they have done so much.[6]

He concluded this section by declaring that nonetheless it really does matter what one's theory of prophecy is, as it bears on the question of the truthfulness of Christ.

> All prophecy is one, is of a kind. The first prophet and the last, and every link between them, have one constitution, and speak truth in one way and from one source. There cannot be more in the flower then in the bud. Any prophet had in him the same elements as the prophet of Nazareth. If there was no Spirit of God in the prophet, then there was no Deity in Christ.[7]

Davidson's final remarks had to do with predictive prophecy: the prophets were not chiefly predictors of future events but speakers of truth relevant to their times. He argued that the amount of prediction in the ministry of Christ - concerning His death, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the world - represents about the same proportion to His general teaching as did the Prophets' to theirs; that is, it was not a large proportion.[8] He concluded by saying that the relationship between prophecy and history - "whether prophecy and history are properly two co-ordinate things that fit exactly into one another, but are both independent; or whether prophecy be not rather secondary, the institutions and the condition of the people at any time being the primary or mould that gave it

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[6] Ibid. , p.17.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., p.18.

its shape" - is "one no doubt difficult to answer."[9] Little is known of such matters, and probably little can be known, but the significant thing is that heretofore few serious attempts have been made to know very much:

> Men have been scared away by the idea, that all this region is beyond the management of the mind. But whatever kind of state it was that the minds of the prophets were in, it is a state in which the human mind may be, and any such state ought to be capable of being intelligently estimated. But there is the closest connection between the prophetic truth delivered at any time, and the historical circumstances in which it was delivered.[10]

There is only one reference in this early article to the content of the preaching of the prophets:

> The text of all prophecy is the Book of Deuteronomy. That book is a homily on the constitution. It is the Sinaitic covenant and the redemptive history translated into its principles. And the prophets are never weary appealing to it. Indeed so singular is the similarity, that many critics maintain that Deuteronomy is a compilation from the prophets; that it is the Mosaic constitution from the view of prophecy of the age of Hezekiah or Manasseh.[11]

There follows no comment of agreement or disagreement with the critics.[12]

"Prophecy and Prophets", written thirty-two years later is of course much more sophisticated in every way, but it does not represent the sort of advance in ideas one might expect. What is striking, however, is the way in which the article begins - with a heavily footnoted introduction on the origins of prophecy among all peoples. It is as "anthropological" as anything found in Davidson and somewhat un-typical of him. Quickly enough he moves to the prophecy of the

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[9] Ibid. This section, incidently, is verbatim from Old Testament Prophecy (pp.98-99) - or vice-versa. Indeed the article looks very like chapter VIII (pp.94ff), indicating that chapter VIII is at least as early as 1870.

[10] "The Prophets", The Family Treasury, p.18.

[11] Ibid., p.20.

[12] But see Andrew Bruce Davidson pp.199f, for comments on Davidson's gradual abandonment of the view that Deuteronomy was the text of the prophets.

Bible; and its history there is given pretty much as it is in the edited lectures with the exception of some interesting and important paragraphs on Apocalyptic which are not part of Prophecy. Included in this section too are comments on the controversial and almost ubiquitous subject of prediction, but these are repeated and elaborated later on. Next comes a section on inspiration and the prophetic state of mind, a subject of considerable interest to Davidson. Something of his views may be had from this passage:

> A person in earnest prayer to God and communion with Him, though his mind will certainly be profoundly exercised, when light dawns on him, or certitude is reached, or conduct becomes plain, will also feel and say with certainty that it was God who gave him the result he reached. It might be rash to say that the experience of such a devout mind is perfectly analogous to that of the prophetic mind, but the analogy is probably the nearest that can be found.[13]

The same thing is said in Old Testament Prophecy.[14]

Davidson's treatment of False Prophets is almost identical between Prophecy and the Dictionary article.[15]

As already indicated, Davidson fairly early on in this article had commented on the predictive element in prophecy. He had said that the wealth of ethical and religious teaching found in the prophets had led to a reaction against the older idea that prophecy was primarily prediction, and that the idea prevalent now was that the true function of the prophet was to be a teacher of ethical and religious truth. But he had also said the the new view was "one-sided."[16] He returned to a fuller discussion of the same subject

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[13] "Prophecy and Prophets", Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, volume IV, pp.115-116.

[14] See for instance, pp.129-130 or p.142, but throughout chapters 9 and 10 where the subject is treated in extenso.

[15] Compare p.118 of the latter with, for instance, pp.303ff of the former.

[16] "Prophecy and Prophets", Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, volume IV, p.111.

and repeated his assertion concerning the one-sidedness of the recent reaction, saying again that the prophets' religious teaching was secondary, the essential thing his outlook into the future.[17] He compared the prophets to Christ and John the Baptist: their main theme, like the prophets', was the (future) Kingdom of God, and their ethical teaching auxiliary to that.

The comparison between Christ and the prophets is exactly the same comparison Davidson used in The Family Treasury article, but here it is put to another use, almost the opposite of that to which it was put in 1870. In that article Davidson was contending for the small proportion of prediction in the prophets and claiming in support that it was about the same as that in Christ's ministry. Here he is arguing, not necessarily that the proportion of outlook into the future is great, but that the importance of the future for both Christ and the prophets is primary. This appears to be a definite change of direction. Whether Davidson is here contending for the older view of prophecy as mainly predictive is doubtful; but he is saying that the focus of prophecy, like that of Christ's teaching, is upon the future, and that the newer view cannot be taken without qualification or mitigation.

In the edited lectures, Davidson used the same comparison and in the same way as he had used it in 1870, indicating that probably that section of Prophecy ought to be classified as early.[18] But is his early view also, in this case, a less advanced view?; or, to put it the other way around, has Davidson, in 1902, in any sense retreated from the more "modern" position he held in 1870? The answer is

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[17] Ibid., pp.118-119.

[18] Old Testament Prophecy, p.90.

probably that his position in 1902 is neither more nor less advanced than that of 1870; it is simply more considered, refined, mature. But the comparison of the two indicates that words like "early" and "late", if they are intended to mean respectively "old-fashioned" and "up-to-date", are in Davidson's case not always applicable.

On the prophetic point of view, Davidson's position in Hastings' does not vary from that in Old Testament Prophecy.[19]

The section in Hastings' on "Messianic Prophecy" is a near duplicate, in structure and themes, of chapter XVIII of Prophecy and in some instances the language is identical.[20] In a similar way the final section of the Dictionary article ("Interpretation and Fulfilment") almost exactly reproduces, although it condenses and therefore slightly modifies, the chapter on "The Prophetic Style" (XI) in Prophecy; at least this is true of the parts having to do with interpretation.[21] The bulk of this final section is also taken up with the theme of prophetic prediction, with special emphasis on the way it should be interpreted. It is the theme that occupies more space in this article than any other. The section and the article close with "The Apostolic Principles of Interpretation", an excellent statement on the relationship of historical criticism to New Testament interpretation which contends that "apostolic exegesis" is "historical exegesis", the latter being simply, in Davidson's opinion, a species or extension of the former. Insofar as it reflects Davidson's view of his exegetical method as both biblical and historical, it perhaps only makes explicit what is implicit throughout his

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[19] Compare p.121 of the former with pp.352-353 of the latter.

[20] Compare for instance p.124, second column of the Hastings' article with p.323 of Prophecy.

[21] Compare the language of p.125, column one, of the Hastings' article with pp.172ff of Prophecy.

work. It is an important statement but not an unexpected one. The bibliographies given in the Hastings' article and Prophecy, with at least one exception - Bishop Marsh's Lectures on the Interpretation of Scripture (1828) is left out of the former - are identical.

The Hastings' article naturally does not give the same extended coverage to the subject as Prophecy does, but that coverage cannot be had except by reading every journal article on the same or similar topics, many of which, in any case, do not give much that is fundamentally different from what is given under the same general heading in the book.[22]

On the special topic with which they deal it is no doubt well to keep in mind Professor Kennedy's advice to "beware of the posthumous Old Testament Prophecy, but to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the great article on that subject in Hastings' Dictionary."[23] Badly edited as Prophecy is, however, the volume is by no means worthless, and its failure to mark off Davidson's early views from his late ones may not be its worst flaw or a fatal one.

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[22]For instance "The Earlier Ideas of Isaiah" in The Expositor fourth series, volume VII, 1893, or "The Prophetess Deborah" in the same journal, third series, volume V, 1887; also "The Book of Isaiah: Chapters XL - LXVI" which appeared in second series, volumes VI, VII, and VIII, 1883 and 1884, as well "The Various Kinds of Messianic Prophecy", volume VIII, 1878.

[23]Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.220.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BEGINNINGS: "HIGHER CRITICISM" IN THE FREE CHURCH FATHERS

Why the church which prided itself on being the strictest evangelical body in Christendom produced A. B. Davidson, William Robertson Smith and George Adam Smith is a question without an easy answer. In the most general terms the answer may be, because it was the Evangelicals who tended to take the Bible, and questions concerning the Bible, most seriously. But that perhaps only underlines the irony of the situation. Nor does it get too much closer to explaining how or why the most rigorous doctrine gave way, in so short a time, to what appeared to be the most well articulated attack on its own position. Alien influences from Germany and elsewhere certainly must account for a good deal of the theological and critical unrest; after all Davidson and the two Smiths, along with a host of other Free Church scholars, spent at least one Summer during their Divinity years studying at Göttingen or Leipsig or Bonn. There is too the spirit of the times: no one could completely escape the pressures of the "transition state" to which Davidson facetiously referred and through which the last half of the nineteenth century was passing. There may be something, however, in the notion that outside influences or even pervading climates of opinion are not the whole answer, and that somehow the defense of the older view of Scripture itself may have suggested or even produced its own compromises. The thesis of this chapter is that the responsibility for the revolution in biblical studies in post-Disruption Scotland may lie partly with the Free Church Fathers themselves, not only because they provided the hard doctrine for their successors to react to,

but because in their defence of the traditional theories they sometimes asked "critical" questions and gave "critical" answers, or, what often has the same effect, gave inadequate answers or none at all, thus perhaps accelerating the very process they intended to arrest.

The Dilemma

The fundamental problem for the traditionalists was that the Bible was both human and divine. It must be. For if, as they argued, it was not supernaturally revealed in the first instance and supernaturally inspired in the second, then we have no objective word from God with which to guide our lives. On the other hand, if it is not just as fully man's word it does not, because it could not, speak to us in our earth-bound finitude. In its double character it is like the Incarnation itself. We can therefore have as little to do with theories of the Bible which obliterate the humanity of its authors as we can with varieties of Docetism which obliterate the humanity of our Lord.

But here, rightly, the analogy between Christ and the Bible tends to give way: insofar as the Bible is human, it is characterised not only by its wild variety of individual styles and miscellany of genres, but by its imperfection as well. The Bible in its human-ness has, in other words, the defects of its virtues. As Candlish put it:

> If it had been the plan of God to reveal his will by infallibly directing Plato in the framing of his idea of a perfect republic, - or our own Philip Sidney in composing his "Arcadia," - there would have been none of the apparent anomalies which it delights the sceptic to detect, and which it sometimes vexes the devout reader to find, in the Mosaic writings, and in the books of Kings.[1]

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[1] R. S. Candlish, Reason and Revelation, p.73.

a. Mistakes In The Bible

For all of its divinity - indeed perhaps precisely because of it - the Bible has mistakes in it. The fact was freely admitted by all its defenders. Alexander Black, first Professor of New Testament at New College and uncompromising exponent of verbal inspiration, asserted that,

> there is no reason to believe that the successive transcribers . . . were supernaturally guarded against the possibility of mistake, - the examination of existing manuscripts, both of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament, proves that such mistakes do actually exist in all the copies that have been inspected.[2]

The operative phrases are copies, existing manuscripts, and successive transcribers; for Black believed that errors did not exist in what God had given in the autographs but only in what had been copied from them, and that the whole business of what he called Verbal Criticism was to bring the text to "a state of the highest possible correctness and purity", that is, to the state of the inspired original.[3] In fact, as he saw it, the requirement for a critical adjustment of the text was a good thing: it helped to eliminate the possibility of all arbitrary alterations in favour of false doctrine. In other words, the necessity and possibility of getting it absolutely right was the best way to guard against all those who, for their own special purposes, were getting it wrong. Nonetheless, Black, for reasons he thought apologetically useful, was freely admitting mistakes in Scripture, at least "in all the copies that have been inspected."

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[2]Alexander Black, "The Exegetical Study of the Original Scriptures Considered in Connection with the Training of Theological Students", in a letter to the Rev. Thomas M'Crie, Moderator of the Free Church of Scotland (Edinburgh: Shepherd and Elliot, 1856), p.9.

[3]Ibid.

Candlish also acknowledged: that the original text of Scripture had suffered from successive copyings; that it must be adjusted by a comparison of manuscripts; that the best adjustment can furnish only an approximation to absolute accuracy; that all translations, ancient and modern, are imperfect; that the rules of criticism must be applied to the interpretation of the Bible; and that in applying them there may be doubt, hesitancy and error. He concluded by confessing that "these circumstances do imply that a certain measure of uncertainty attaches to the Scriptures as we now have them" - "though", he added, "far less than in the case of any other ancient book, . . ."[4]

Even Cunningham conceded that it is more difficult to prove divine origin in some portions of Scripture than in others. He cited, in agreement with Richard Baxter (but in disagreement with Robert Haldane), The Song of Solomon.[5] As with Black though, and for the same reasons, Cunningham's concessions are not to be taken as a denial of the doctrine of verbal inspiration. They are arguments, rather, in support of an even more zealous pursuit of the text in its primal integrity.

b. Imperfection "Proper" To Scripture

In a sense then, there is a kind of imperfection in the Scriptures that is proper to them, and for Black and Cunningham at any rate, the mistakes are almost the means by which the word of God in its flawless perfection is attained, though it is doubtful if either of them would have put it quite like that.

"Proper imperfection" does seem to have the status of something like a conceptual tool for Bannerman however; it provides a way of

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[4]Candlish, Reason and Revelation, pp.42-43.

[5]Cunningham, Lectures, pp.290ff.

understanding and thereby proving plenary inspiration. "We must, in meeting the objections commonly urged against Scripture infallibility" he said, "lay it down . . . that the defects or imperfections proper to the sacred authors are quite consistent with the doctrine of plenary inspiration."[6] Bannerman's point was that since the Bible must be just as fully human as it is fully divine, it cannot be exempt from those natural deficiencies which it would have manifested without inspiration. By the same token, of course, terms like imperfection must be carefully defined, Bannerman warned, and "limited to imperfection not interfering with the infallible truth and divine authority of the record."[7] Bannerman, although for different reasons than Black or Cunningham, also admitted mistakes in Scripture, and used them for the prosecution of his case in Scripture's behalf. Nonetheless he and they did admit them, even if they are to be found only in the copies and even if they are to be taken only as evidence of the Bible's obvious and required humanity.

c. Openness To Criticism

The Bible then is a human book as well as a divine book. The evidence is its deficiencies. It must be handled therefore as a human book even as it is reverenced as a divine book. "Interpret the Bible in the same way and upon the same principles as you would interpret any other book" is, in a general way, a sound maxim, Bannerman maintained. The problem with it is that it is only half the truth; it needs to be modified to the extent that the divine writers were inspired and exempted from error.[8] Nonetheless Jowett was right as far as he went,

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[6] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.507.

[7] Ibid., pp.507-508.

[8] Ibid., pp.563-565.

and Bannerman, that far, went with him.[9] In other words, as long as it was kept in its proper place or seen in its proper perspective, criticism was unobjectionable. The use of it, for Bannerman, rather proved the double character of the Bible.

Candlish too went out of his way to assure "intelligent and thoughtful men" that "there is to be no attempt to put down inquiry, brevi manu, by the mere summary assertion of authority and imputations of heresy." They need not fear that theological dicta would over-rule scientific inquiries and results. "Let them see that we face the question in a very different spirit", he declared, "that we have something of the Baconian as well as the dogmatic mind in us."[10] In fact Candlish, who twenty five years before had been nominated to occupy the first Chair of Biblical Criticism in the University of Edinburgh,[11] gave evidence of positively encouraging a bold analysis of the Scriptures, not only because on their human side they are open to it, but because on their divine side they deserve it. If Homer, how much more the Bible?

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[9] Bannerman did not actually name Jowett, even though he discussed his principle.

[10] Christianity and Recent Speculations: Six Lectures By Ministers of the Free Church, with a Preface by R. S. Candlish (Edinburgh: John MacLarne, 1866), pp. vi-vii.

[11] His appointment was quashed in Parliament, however, in the session of 1841, on the grounds that he had broken an interdict of the Court of Session by preaching in Strathbogie - an attempt on the part of the government, according to Hanna, to make the Church to understand "that while neither of the two great political parties in the State were disposed to interfere for her extraction, they both agreed in regarding it as imperative upon her to give such obedience to the law, as the Court of Session was requiring at her hands." William Hanna, Memoirs of The Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers, vol. IV, p.227.

> If the Scriptures have God as their author, it surely concerns us all the more on that account, to have them submitted to the most critical scrutiny . . . . Our worthy scholar and theologian, therefore, may calm his alarmed soul, and rest assured that the theory of a plenary inspiration will give him no cause to cry 'Othello's occupation's gone'.[12]

The even sterner supporters of verbal inspiration also advocated "the most searching critical scrutiny" of Scripture. Black and Cunningham were both unavoidably committed to the most rigorous analysis of the Bible's words, because, as Black declared, "it is by words that we engage in the exercise of communion with God: it was by words that God communicated the knowledge of His will to man in the respective languages that He was pleased to employ for this purpose."[13] If we are to know God we must give ourselves to an exacting study of the words by which He has spoken to us. It cannot be pretended that Black and Cunningham advocated "higher criticism" of any kind. They would have opposed whatever hinted of "German infidelity." Nonetheless their theory of inspiration made the most stringent analysis of Scripture mandatory.

If for Bannerman the requirement for biblical criticism was simply a concomitant of the Bible's humanity and in that sense unavoidable, and if for Cunningham and Black it was absolutely necessary to an understanding of the mind of God and therefore a kind of holy obligation, for Candlish it was more an opportunity to see the truth of God vindicated, a crusade or adventure of sorts. For whatever reasons - and the variety of reasons is in itself interesting - all the defenders of plenary inspiration recognised the need for, if they

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[12] Candlish, Reason and Revelation, pp.43-44.

[13] Black, "The Exegetical Study of the Original Scriptures Considered in Connection with the Training of Theological Students", p.7; also Cunningham, Lectures, pp.343ff.

did not positively encourage, some kind of biblical criticism, biblical analysis at any rate.

The Bible the traditionalists wanted was both human and divine, not merely because they had no alternative but because their doctrine itself required it. A theory of mechanical dictation was just as out of court therefore as a subjectivist theory of partial inspiration. One tended to mitigate the human element in Scripture and the other to mitigate the divine, and both attempted to explain how the Scriptures were inspired. In fact, there was a sense in which the human really is a kind of proof of the divine. Bannerman and Candlish tend to argue this way. But the Bible's humanity brings with it human fallibility, if not in the original manuscripts then in the transcriptions. And if mistakes are admitted, then critical analysis is required. It may even be encouraged, as in the case of Candlish, sometimes with definite, perhaps severe limitations, but nonetheless in all cases more or less welcomed. How then to defend the Bible against critical attack and at the same time to be themselves in some sense critical - this was the dilemma for the defenders of plenary inspiration. Had they lived a century earlier, indeed half a century earlier, they would have found the problems much less heart-searching and mind-stretching. But at this stage in the debate they saw themselves as the defenders, not simply of a particular view of the Bible, but of a whole system of theology and style of piety, the beliefs of the Reformers, the Creed of Westminster, all that the Disruption Church stood for and more, in short, nothing less than historic Protestant Christianity as they saw it. What might have been a simple transition became a crisis or predicament of transition wherein a doctrine which may have needed only a certain refinement of definition was requiring the most radical

defence measures under the combined assault of both secular and biblical science. It is too harsh a judgement to call the traditionalist response reactionary or obscurantist, as if they really had absolutely nothing to fear and therefore nothing to defend. Whether they defended too much or well is perhaps a question. But the fact that they defended as they did is probably only an illustration of how difficult is the business of guarding the treasures of antiquity that they be not lost, as "Rabbi" Duncan put it, without being, in his words, "bigotedly conservative - i.e. blind to progressive light."[14]

Specific Problem Texts

The predicament in which the defenders of plenary inspiration found themselves was of a compound nature. In the first place it required that they solve problems set them by their antagonists. In the second place it required that they solve problems which they had set for themselves. For in the process of solving those of the first sort they created those of the second. Something of the nature of the predicament can be seen in the variety of answers they gave to problems posed by particularly or notoriously awkward texts.

a. Genesis 1 And 2

Candlish's commentary on Genesis was first published in 1843 in three volumes. It was revised and issued again in 1868 under a slightly different title and a third edition, essentially the same as the second, was offered in one volume in 1884. The differences between the editions, especially between the first and second, though slight, reflect something of changing attitudes in biblical scholarship, but less of the

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[14]William Knight, Colloquia Peripatetica; Notes of Conversations with John Duncan (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1879), p.9.

changes in science than one might expect, considering that Origin of Species as well as Essays and Reviews had created its sensation in the interim. Toward scientific and biblical scholarship there is mixed feeling on Candlish's part. The commentary suggests that he might warmly embrace both if somehow he could be persuaded that they were completely trustworthy.

In all the editions of the commentary including the first, Candlish maintained that the object of the first two chapters of Genesis is not scientific but religious.

> Hence it was to be expected that, while nothing contained in it could ever be found really and in the long run to contradict science, the gradual progress of discovery might give occasion for apparent temporary contradictions. The current interpretations of the Divine record, in such matters, will naturally, and indeed, must necessarily, accommodate itself to the actual state of scientific knowledge and opinion at the time.[15]

The essential facts of the record are the recent date assigned to the existence of man on the earth, the previous preparation of the earth for his habitation, the gradual nature of the work and the distinction and succession of days during its progress. These, he affirmed, cannot be impugned by any scientific investigations, Darwin apparently notwithstanding. At the same time a very long history may have preceded that given in Genesis.

> What countless generations of living organisms may have teemed in the chaotic waters, or brooded over the dark abyss, it is not within the scope of the inspiring Spirit to tell. There is room and space for whole volumes of such matter before the Holy Ghost takes up the record.[16]

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[15] R. S. Candlish, The Book of Genesis Expounded in a Series of Discourses, 2 vols.,(Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1868), vol. I, p.19.

[16] Ibid.

The themes which dominate Candlish's discussion of the creation narrative are that it is a figurative account and that it is therefore a partial account, the full meaning of which will be revealed only when the time of the restitution of all things has arrived. "The exact literal sense of much that is now obscure or doubtful, as well as the bearing and importance of what may seem insignificant or irrelevant, will then clearly appear."[17]

Candlish's emphasis on "the moral and spiritual aspect of this sacred narrative" is conspicuous. He took it as a description of the original relationship of man to his Maker and as a figurative representation of his restoration from moral chaos to spiritual beauty.[18] One of his major concerns was to restore to the story something of what he considered its essential character. "This divine record of Creation", he complained, "remarkable for the most perfect simplicity, has been sadly complicated and embarrassed by the human theories and speculations with which it has unhappily become entangled."[19]

Clearly Candlish did not regard Genesis 1 and 2 as primarily scientific or historical.[20] In no sense was he denying the inspiration of the Scriptures by saying so, however. On the contrary, he was attempting to safeguard it by putting it out of the range of critical attack altogether; for if Genesis was not intended to be history or science in the first place, then it is not liable to the charge that it contradicts the evidence of historical or scientific investigation -

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[17] Ibid., p.20.

[18] Ibid., p.19.

[19] Ibid., p.18.

[20] It is interesting in this connection that Drummond and Bulloch refer to Candlish's Genesis as a "highly conservative" study. The Church in Victorian Scotland, 1843-1874, p.255.

not at all, of course, an un-modern approach to the book. In fact Marcus Dods, accused in 1890 of subverting the doctrine of inspiration, wrote a commentary which in some ways is strikingly like Candlish's, and in it said of the compiler of Genesis:

> He does describe the process of creation, but he describes it only for the sake of the ideas regarding man's relation to God and God's relation to the world which he can thereby convey. Indeed what we mean by scientific knowledge was not in all the thoughts of the people for whom the book was written. The subject of creation, of the beginning of man upon earth, was not approached from that side at all; and if we are to understand what is here written we must burst the trammels of our own modes of thought and read these chapters not as a chronological, astronomical, geological, biological statement, but as a moral or spiritual conception.[21]

In the Prefatory Note to his 1843 edition Candlish expressed the hope that "by the blessing of God, the tendency of what follows is not to raise speculative questions, but to cherish a spiritual and practical frame of mind, in the devout study of the Word of the living God."[22] He wanted to steer clear of any confrontation with allegedly hostile science, no doubt because he, perhaps like Dods, thought it unnecessary or unprofitable or unjustified.

The confrontation,however,was not to be avoided, for in the revision of 1868, in an appendix which he said "some may think might perhaps be more properly placed as a preface or introduction", Candlish evidently felt himself obligated to remark on current trends. Moses, it seemed to him, had fared very much as Homer had fared: Genesis and the Iliad had both been torn to shreds and "parcelled out among a motley

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[21] Marcus Dods, The Book of Genesis (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), pp.2-3.

[22] R. S. Candlish, Exposition of the Book of Genesis, 3 volumes (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1843), vol. I, p. iv.

and miscellaneous crowd of unknown documents and imaginary authors."[23]

Candlish saw multi-author theories as "an appeal from word-catching and hair-splitting analysis" and gave his own judgement that Genesis had "the stamp and impress of an undivided authorship."[24] At the same time he contended that his view was not inconsistent with there being many traces in Genesis, both of earlier documents or traditions, and of later editions and revisions. From the very nature of the case it must be so: it would be absurd to suppose that learned and inspired authors would not take advantage of the material, lyrical, legendary, and monumental, at their disposal.[25] Candlish therefore agreed with the critics - but only up to a point. There is evidence in Genesis of "source material" - common sense would tell us that there might be - but a documentary hypothesis in anything like its more advanced formulations had overtones which were for him quite unacceptable.

There is in Candlish amongst the traditionalists then this interesting combination of old and new. In some things he lookd not entirely unlike the later and not at all traditional Dods; and as for who wrote Genesis, or how it was written, well yes there probably was a variety of sources, but no there was not a variety of authors.

The comparison between Candlish and Dods becomes even more interesting when seen in the light of a comparison between Candlish and Bannerman. There can be little doubt that Candlish and Bannerman were allied in their defence of a view of Scripture which Dods plainly did not share.[26] But on Genesis 1 and 2 Candlish stands closer to Dods

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[23] Candlish, The Book of Genesis Expounded in a Series of Discourses, vol. II, p.349.

[24] Ibid., p.350.

[25] Ibid., pp.350-351.

[26] See for instance Marcus Dods The Bible: Its Origin and Nature (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1905), pp.123ff.

than he does to Bannerman; and Bannerman, whose position is thought by some to represent an advance on, or retreat from, the traditional view (and might therefore be expected to be more in line with Dods), actually takes a harder line than Candlish, although not for altogether traditional reasons.

What Bannerman shared with Candlish was a not very intense or sharply defined but nonetheless unmistakable distaste for what Candlish termed multi-author theories. "The recent theories that would refer the origin of some of the Scripture books, or parts of books, to prior documents or existing traditions, may be safely left by the friends of plenary inspiration to stand or fall by their own precarious evidence."[27] And even though he thought it was unlikely that such theories would last, he argued, rather like Candlish, that "the principle involved in them can be readily squared with the facts of inspiration."[28] Even granted that the narratives of Moses and the New Testament Evangelists were made up of elements borrowed from previous documents or traditions, such elements were nonetheless selected and fashioned by the inspired man under divine influence to express the mind of the Spirit, and are therefore not less infallible and authoritative than any other portion of God's Word.[29] Although neither of them personally saw much credibility in documentary hypotheses, both Candlish and Bannerman, like many in later generations, could fit them, without too much difficulty, into their doctrine of inspiration.

What Bannerman did not share with Candlish was the view that Genesis 1 and 2 are primarily figurative and spiritual. Bannerman

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[27] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.536.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

referred to the writer or compiler of Genesis as "the historian of Genesis" and his record is a record of what actually happened. Genesis, for Bannerman, is historical, and its veracity can be accepted on the same grounds as that of any honest history. It is not of course a first-hand account, but it is nonetheless an accurate account, inasmuch as the writer's source was a divine revelation.

> A supernatural communication of facts and truth from God must be held as more than sufficient as a source of information to supply the place of ordinary personal or contemporary acquaintance with what he records; so that, writing or speaking at the distance of thousands of years from the events, he was able to narrate them as if they had been events of his own day.[30]

Neither Bannerman nor Candlish had the slightest intention of diluting his doctrine of inspiration, but their respective treatments of the creation narrative almost perfectly demonstrate that there were different, even opposite ways of defending it. By urging that the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2 was never intended to be taken as history, Candlish argued that it is therefore not vulnerable to whatever a hostile analysis might try to make of it; it remains true against the attack of scientific or historical investigation. Bannerman on the other hand, while acknowledging that Genesis could not be an eye-witness account, contended that the narrator nonetheless had access to "a source of knowledge not less authentic and credible than contemporary witnesses, or even his own personal observation."[31] For Bannerman the objective and supernatural reality of the revelation was altogether central to his doctrine of inspiration and that objectivity demanded, if it did not equal, historical veracity. With regard to Genesis, at any rate, Candlish and Bannerman both kept their doctrine

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[30] Ibid., pp.76-77.

[31] Ibid., p.76.

of inspiration intact, but for opposite reasons and by opposite means.

Cunningham said very little concerning Genesis 1 and 2. His view is summed up in the question, "What reliance . . . could be placed upon an account of the creation of the world, and the important transactions connected with the origin of our race, by a man who lived 2500 years after they had taken place, unless God had directed him?"[32]

b. I Corinthians 7

I Corinthians 7 was apparently a favourite whipping boy for those arguing against full inspiration; and the defences of it, though never so dissimilar as those of Genesis, indicate something of the same variety of mind and method in the older school.

The problem in I Corinthians 7 is Paul's remark, made in reply to questions concerning marriage, that "I speak this by permission, and not of commandment" (v. 6). Those who denied plenary inspiration argued that Paul was saying that his advice here was merely his own, allowed but not commanded by God, and that it was therefore not inspired.

Both Bannerman and Cunningham contended that Paul's reference is not to the inspiration of the advice but to the obligation of his readers to heed it. In other words, when Paul says "I speak this by permission, not of commandment", he is not saying "The Lord has not commanded me to say it", he is only saying "The Lord has not bound you to follow it; on this issue you are free to do as you like."[33] There is nothing in this passage then for either Cunningham or Bannerman that contradicts a doctrine of plenary inspiration.

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[32] Cunningham, Lectures, p.299.

[33] Ibid., p.396; Bannerman, Inspiration, p.414.

A few verses later in the same Corinthians passage another problem of the same sort arises and Cunningham and Bannerman both treated it in the same way, but with an added difference. In verse 10 Paul says to those who are married that wives should not separate from their husbands and husbands should not divorce their wives, a charge I give, says Paul, "yet not I but the Lord." In verse 12, on the other hand, Paul writes, "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away, and the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him." The distinction between verse 10 and verse 12, Bannerman and Cunningham both contended, is that whereas in verse 10 Paul was simply acknowledging that Jesus himself had already settled the matter of divorce and the judgement from Him was all that was needed, in verse 12 Paul is saying, in effect; "on the question of the relationship between married persons, one of whom is a believer and one of whom is not, Jesus has not pronounced; I therefore take it as an obligation, in the exercise of my apostolic office under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to decide the matter myself."[34] On this occasion then Paul is saying that although God has not previously declared His mind on this issue, he, Paul, as an inspired apostle, is now doing so, and his words "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord", so far from being a disavowal of his inspiration are a positive assertion of it. Moreover, Bannerman added - and here he differs significantly and interestingly from Cunningham - not only was Paul exercising his legitimate apostolic liberty in giving a command for which no Dominical lead had been given,

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[34] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.415; Cunningham, Lectures, p.397.

he was positively abrogating the Mosaic law in doing so. The Jew, Bannerman argued, had been required to divorce his heathen wife; Paul is advising that a man with an unbelieving wife should not divorce her.

> The contrast suggested is not between what was spoken by inspiration of the Spirit and what was spoken by Paul without inspiration; but rather between a formal law long before laid down by the Lord, and a new commandment given by Paul in his character as an apostolic and inspired man. There is no concession, as has been alleged, that in anything he speaks without inspiration; on the contrary, the very nature of his decision, running counter as it did to the Mosaic practice, would itself prove it to be an inspired revelation from God.[35]

Both Cunningham and Bannerman took what appears to be a Pauline denial of inspiration on a particular point and attempted to show it to be, in fact, a proof of Pauline inspiration. Bannerman went further: insofar as Paul's remarks run counter to Mosaic practice they prove his apostolic authority; his freedom to abrogate the Law is apparently evidence that he was divinely inspired to abrogate it - not an apologetic method that Bannerman would approve in every case, one imagines, but one he evidently felt warranted here.[36]

The similarities between Candlish and Bannerman in their handling of Genesis 1 and 2, and especially perhaps between Cunningham and Bannerman in their handling of I Corinthians 7, provide what one review

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[35] Bannerman, Inspiration, pp.415-416. See also p.529 on the same point and Bannerman's cryptic remark (a misprint?) that "In the case of Job's friends we have clear intimation that their sentiments expressed in Scripture were repudiated by God; in the case of Paul we have no distinct evidence that his opinions expressed in Scripture were sanctioned by God."

[36] Dods, interestingly, said nothing about this issue in his commentary on I Corinthians, but probably because the nature of the series in which the commentary appeared (The Expositor's Bible), being practical rather than technical, did not require a discussion of such matters.

of Cunningham's Lectures regarded as "a specimen of the theological methods which were sanctioned by the Free Church during the first year of its existence."[37] The differences between them point up the fact that there was a remarkable variety in the defence of the traditional doctrine of inspiration, a variety compounded by individualities and downright differences of opinion not usually considered characteristic of "the old view." The defence of the doctrine of plenary inspiration in connection with specific problem texts is fairly straightforward most of the time. Overall it makes its point. Nonetheless there are enough kinks in it to suggest that it was by no means absolutely stable or unalterable. Certainly there is evidence - the differences between Candlish and Bannerman on the essential character of the creation account is perhaps the best - that later "modern" views may have gotten some encouragement from the Free Church Fathers themselves.

Specific Problem Issues

With regard to specific problem issues, as opposed to problem texts, the solutions offered by the traditionalists demonstrate something of the same thing, although on this score the bogey is not so much the differences between the apologists that surprise the reader expecting consistency as it is the ambiguity of the arguments that bewilder the reader expecting proof. The result is a bewilderment which is sometimes shared, apparently, by the apologist himself.

a. New Testament Writers Quoting The Old Testament

The freedom with which the New Testament writers quote the Old Testament was of course ideal fodder for arguments against verbal

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[37] The Bibliotheca Sacra, volume XXXV (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1878), pp.783-787.

inspiration, and for it Candlish and others felt themselves constrained to give some explanation. It was, Candlish acknowledged, one of "not a few things that have been regarded as difficulties and objections in the way of the infallibility of Scripture." If the Bible is inspired equally throughout then what is to be made of the apparent misquotation of inspired Old Testament texts by New Testament writers? "I am persuaded that the New Testament teachers felt themselves at liberty to deal with the Old Testament as freely as they did", Candlish answered, "solely because they were, - and because they knew they were, - under the control and superintendence of the Spirit of Truth, who would not suffer them to err."[38] In whatever way any New Testament writer may have quoted or seemed to have misquoted the Old Testament, he did so, Candlish maintained, because he believed that the inspiration he enjoyed was his guarantee against error.

Quite apart from the prior question of whether or not the New Testament writers actually knew themselves to be writing under divine control (Candlish took it for granted that they did), there is the question of what Candlish meant by saying that the Holy Spirit would not suffer them to err. Clearly he did not mean that the New Testament writers believed that the Holy Spirit would somehow give to their language an accuracy which they themselves had not given to it. There would be no problem to discuss if it were not obvious that their language lacked accuracy. He might have meant, however, that they believed their meaning would be clear whether they had gotten the quotation word for word or not - a view not too far removed from the inspired in content but not in words view of those who denied verbal inspiration.

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[38] Candlish, Reason and Revelation, p.82.

Whatever his meaning in this particular matter, Candlish believed that the New Testament writers were completely justified in using the Old Testament as they did in proof of what they were teaching. They were interpreting it and applying it, Candlish said, drawing out its full meaning as it was developed by later revelation, and their very consciousness of a divine superintendence being exerted over them would make them feel that they were warranted in exercising a large measure of discretion.[39] What may appear to be a mere loose-handling of texts is, in Candlish's view, the exercise of an entitlement to bring to bear upon the Old Testament the greater understanding of the writers of the New. In other words, as Candlish put it, "the apostle understands the prophet better than the prophet could understand himself, and expresses the meaning of the passage better than the prophet himself, in the circumstances, could express it."[40] The office and obligation of the apostles being what it was, they could afford to be less than absolutely accurate in quoting from the Old Testament, because absolute accuracy in quoting was not their primary concern.

> They do not study always literal and verbal accuracy. They interpret while they quote. They have respect to the use and application which they are making of the words, father than to the mere words themselves; giving the true evangelical sense, if not the very terms in which originally that sense may have been more or less imperfectly conveyed.[41]

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[39] Ibid., p.80.

[40] Ibid., p.81.

[41] Ibid. To what extent was Candlish quoting Calvin when he argued that the apostles "do not always study literal and verbal accuracy"? "They were not over-scrupulous in quoting words provided that they did not misuse Scripture for their convenience. We must always look at the purpose for which quotations are made because they have careful regard for the main object so as not to turn Scripture to a false meaning, but as far as words are concerned, as in other things which are not relevant to the present purpose, they allow themselves some indulgence." Comment on Hebrews 10.6, The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews, Calvin's Commentaries, Edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), p.136.

Admittedly, what Candlish said must somehow be true. Nonetheless he failed to meet the real issue, namely the distinction between neglecting to quote the Old Testament with absolutely perfect accuracy and what appears to be loose handling of it. And in what sense can a writer be said to be honestly interpreting a text if it is not the exact text he is interpreting? Moreover, what now of the inspiration of the original words which only more or less imperfectly conveyed what later explanation shows to be their true sense?

Candlish apparently felt the exigency of his dilemma.

> All this seems to be capable of a reasonable and satisfactory explanation, on the supposition of an infallible divine guidance being incessantly exercised over what the apostles and evangelists wrote. I confess, however, that on any other supposition I consider it to be inexplicable. I can scarcely reconcile it, I would almost say, with fair dealing. At all events, I cannot reconcile it with that reverence for the very letter of their sacred books which was a peculiar characteristic of Jewish writers of old, and that sense of responsibility for even verbal correctness which men in their position must have owned.[42]

None of this is to be taken as an attack on Candlish or his doctrine. It is to be taken primarily as evidence of how an attempt to defend the doctrine almost unavoidably posed questions which were as perplexing as those it proposed to answer. Candlish set himself a difficult task, but the problem of the way New Testament writers handle the Old Testament was not the worst of it; the worst was reconciling the solution of that problem to the full inspiration of the Bible. To say that the apostles "do not study always literal and verbal accuracy" may or may not be a satisfactory explanation. It becomes less satisfactory when it is given as part of an argument in defence

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[42]Candlish, Reason and Revelation, p.81-82.

of what he once referred to as "the equivalent of verbal dictation."[43]

Bannerman's solution to the problem of Old Testament quotations in the New pretty much parallels Candlish's, but without the same transparent awareness of the difficulties. In merely human writings, said Bannerman, the limits within which quotations may differ from the original text depends upon the purpose for which they were made. Such quotations, "from the most distant allusion to the language . . . up to the entire transference of language and meaning from the page of one author to the page of the other", are employed by human writers without any charge of misquotation, provided they do not attempt to establish their own opinion by quoting in a way which does not express the language's original meaning.[44] The same freedom must be allowed to the authors of Scripture: it cannot be fair to refuse inspired writers a leniency in judgement which would be readily granted any honest uninspired writer. But New Testament quotations from the Old often do give a meaning unknown to the original author, a mode of quotation which could not be justified in the case of ordinary writings. In the case of inspired writings, however, this method of quotation is just the proof that they are inspired: "it is only such a supernatural inspiration that can explain and account for it."[45] The same God who put into the Old Testament predictions and types and histories a meaning unknown to those who recorded them, also enabled the New Testament writers to find out that meaning and express it truly.[46]

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[43] In the course of explaining what he understood by the term inspiration, Candlish said: "It is of very little consequence whether you call this verbal dictation or not. It is equivalent to verbal dictation, as regards the reliance which we may place on the discourse, or the document, that is the result of it." Reason and Revelation, p.23.

[44] Bannerman, Inspiration, pp.532-533.

[45] Ibid., p.533-534.

[46] Ibid.

Cunningham did not really deal with the question of Old Testament quotations in the New, but confined himself to "applications of the Old Testament by our Saviour and his apostles, which indicate that they regarded it as verbally inspired."[47]

b. Discrepancies Between The Gospels

Balancing or blending the human and divine in Scripture was the central problem for the traditionalists. In no uncertain terms they declared themselves opposed to mechanical theories of inspiration; with the same firmness they refused any thing less than a doctrine of full inspiration. Getting the two sides of their position together was their dilemma, the frontier between the two both a refuge and a limbo, the place where perplexities vanished but also the place where others lurked hidden or forgotten. The way the Old Testament is quoted in the New highlights the problem in one way. The lack of uniformity between the Gospels highlights it in another and perhaps better way. That there are certain discrepancies between the Evangelists is a fact no defender of plenary inspiration could avoid, yet their attempts to explain it seemed only to open up a kind of Pandora's box, again raising as many questions as they answered.

Candlish's defence of the Evangelists consists in a supposition. Suppose that Christ, during His lifetime or after His resurrection, wanted four of His followers to write down, separately and independently, what they remembered of His sayings and doings; their several accounts they would then bring to Him for revision and correction. "The knowledge that what they wrote was to be submitted to their Master's eye", Candlish contended, "would be a stimulus to all of them

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[47] Cunningham, Lectures, p.369.

to do their best. But would it not also give them great boldness and freedom in executing their task?" In other words, the assurance that Christ would be editing their work, rather than hamper them, would release them from the fear of not giving verbatim every sentence of a discourse, or not stating every particular about a miracle; moreover, they would not be bothered about apparent differences between their accounts: each writer would follow his own bent and there would be "a free play and exercise of their faculties and feelings."[48] And what will Christ do with the four manuscripts submitted to Him? Will He retrench here and enlarge there, cut, alter and amend? He will not, said Candlish.

> He will leave the memoirs in the freedom and freshness of their original spontaneous simplicity; He prefers their easy and artless reminiscence to an absolutely perfect history, as giving really a truer and more life-like representation of himself. He suffers them to go forth under his sanction, although he quite well foresees that the different ways in which they tell the story of his life may give rise to questions that could only be solved by a fuller and more exact narrative than any one of all the four professes to be.[49]

Candlish may very well be right, but what are the implications of this kind of argument for his case overall? Even if easy and artless reminiscences really do give, in some sense, a truer representation than an absolutely perfect history, where does Candlish's saying so leave his doctrine of inspiration? He has practically invited attacks on the historicity of the Gospels, or at least on the necessity of historical accuracy in them. The problem is by any reckoning a difficult one, possibly insoluble, but in trying to solve it as he does, Candlish has given away too much.

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[48] Candlish, Reason and Revelation, p.78.

[49] Ibid., p.79.

Bannerman's procedure on this issue remains pretty much true to form. There is nothing incompatible between men writing simply as historians and the same men writing under the inspiration of God. Although God caused them first to receive a revelation and afterwards moved them to record what was revealed He did not suspend their human powers and peculiarities. "They acted (with the one exception of being kept from error) precisely as they would have acted had they been set down to write the account of facts and truths coming to them from some other quarter than from God, and guaranteed by no warrant except their own knowledge and truth as historians."[50] And the fact that the Evangelists did not all follow the same chronological sequence in narrating our Saviour's life - neither is that a decisive argument against inspiration in the highest and most complete sense of the word. The freedom with which they individually arranged their material is simply a particular instance of the individuality they were allowed to exercise generally. Moreover their narratives do not profess to follow any sequence; and our failure to recognise a chronological pattern in them is not to be accounted a contradiction or falsehood on their part.[51]

> The difficulty, or the impossibility in some instances, of harmonizing, according to the order of time, the events of the evangelical history, is precisely what might have been expected in the case of four independent human historians, writing according to the ordinary laws that guide authors in such matters. The grand and outstanding events of the history fall easily and naturally into their places, in their proper order of time. The minor details, in the shape both of events and discourses, in the narrative of our Lord's life, are, to a large extent, arranged in the history according to some other and higher principle than that of chronological succession.[52]

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[50] Bannerman, Inspiration, pp.498-499.

[51] Ibid., pp.500-501.

[52] Ibid., p.501.

The "one grand difficulty" of combining the human and the divine, as Cunningham called it, Bannerman nicely turned to the purpose of disposing of almost every problem raised by it.[53] Although the mode of quoting the Old Testament employed by the New Testament writers could not be allowed in ordinary writers and writings, in the inspired writings it is just the evidence - for no other theory can explain it - that they are inspired. Likewise the differences between the gospel accounts of our Lord's life: so far from detracting from our conception of their truthfulness, they enhance it and give evidence, not only of the honesty of the writers (they were not acting in collusion), but of their adherence to a higher historiographical principle than that of time sequence alone.

Cunningham, much like Bannerman, simply asserted that the Gospels are inspired; but the fact that the Holy Spirit employed men in writing them is in no way inconsistent with their being allowed "whatever diversity in their narratives was consistent with their veracity and accuracy as estimated by the principles by which these things are ordinarily judged of among men."[54]

Bannerman seemed to be very little worried by what Candlish from time to time hints might be a nettlesome problem, namely the humanness of the sacred and completely inspired Scriptures. Cunningham was worried even less. Or it may be that the issues which Cunningham simply did not take up, Bannerman argued in what seems a circular kind of way and Candlish, attempting to do the fullest justice to both elements in his doctrine, especially perhaps the human element, only opened wider, inviting further scrutiny. It is clear enough what

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[53] Bannerman also used the phrase "the grand difficulty." Ibid., p.512.

[54] Cunningham, Lectures, pp.383-384.

doctrine, generally speaking, all are defending. It is just as clear that in their application of the doctrine to certain recognised problem texts and problem issues there is not the same unanimity. There are considerable differences of both method and mind, some on issues of a fairly fundamental nature.

More General Questions

The same unity and diversity is apparent in their comments on questions of a more general character, such as those of the Bible's purpose, of the original manuscripts versus the transcriptions, of the methods of interpretation, and of the nature of divine revelation. The answers given by the apologists to these kinds of questions highlight, perhaps even more than their handling of specific texts and specific issues, the essential differences as well as the essential sameness of their views of the Bible.

a. The Bible's Purpose: Comprehensive Or Limited?

Candlish's insistence that the creation story be taken figuratively and not literally suggests that he believed that the Bible's purpose was limited. Certainly he held that to be the case with Genesis 1 and 2. "The object of this inspired cosmogony, or account of the world's origin", he said in his commentary, "is not scientific but religious."[55] And even though any revelation of God to man must necessarily touch on matters of science and history, "God did not mean to make either those whom he employed as his agents in giving the revelation, or the people to whom they gave it, wiser or better informed on these subjects, than they would have been without a revelation - except only insofar as it

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[55] Candlish, The Book of Genesis Expounded in a Series of Discourses, vol. I, p.19.

might be necessary for spiritual and moral ends."[56] God's problem, as Candlish saw it, was to deal with questions of science and history in such a way as on the one hand not to anticipate the discoveries men would make for themselves and yet on the other hand not to be inconsistent with them.[57] It is the proof of the Bible's divine authorship, in fact, that it alone of all religious books is able to do this successfully.[58] Even the Confession and Catechism demonstrate their human fallibility on this score by comparison with the Bible. The relationship between Genesis and recent discoveries in geology, Candlish thought, was a case in point. The Westminster divines, learned but uninspired, "could not make provision for a state of knowledge not yet reached" and "cannot be considered authoritative on a point which was not then raised."[57] While they used language that cannot be harmonised with the teaching of science, Moses, by contrast, is reserved - and therefore flexible.

> The inspiring and superintending Spirit does not give him scientific information in advance of his age. But care is taken, that, writing according to the scientific views of his age, he shall say nothing that is to be found ultimately incompatible or irreconcilable . . . with what the advancing march of inquiry is to go on unfolding to the end of time.[60]

A good illustration of the way God's revelation harmonises with men's discoveries is Galileo. His discovery that the earth moves round the sun and not the sun round the earth was as much a divine as a human disclosure. It pulled down wrong interpretations of Scripture as much

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[56] Candlish, Reason and Revelation, p.83.

[57] Ibid., p.83.

[58] Ibid., p.85.

[59] Ibid., p.86.

[60] Ibid.

as it did wrong conceptions of the universe. "'It moves! it moves!' cries the martyr in the cause of science; - a martyr also, as it turns out, in the cause of revelation too."[61]

The object of the Bible, Bannerman also maintained, was to make known to men religious and not scientific truths, references in Scripture to the latter being only incidental.[62] Human language, moreover, is limited: it cannot be used in an ordinary and a scientific way at the same time. To be understood, the sacred authors could not avoid using the language of common life. Had they done otherwise, "we would have had a miraculous anticipation, thousands of years before, of modern discoveries, and a record of them in language scientific and appropriate to the facts, but unintelligible to its readers."[63] Their descriptions of nature are therefore descriptions of the appearances of nature, rather than of the scientific relations of the phenomena. The appearances described are just as real and true, nonetheless, as those that would come later with the discoveries of modern science.[64] Like Candlish, Bannerman made the important distinction between different types of language in Scripture, allowed for the progressive unfolding of scientific truth by human inquiry and saw no conflict between the sacred (popular) presentation of natural events and the explanation of them made possible by modern science.

Cunningham, who took the hardest line on verbal inspiration, insisted that the Scriptures were inspired "not only in those portions

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[61] Ibid., p.84.

[62] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.551.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

which may appear to treat more directly and formally of religious and moral subjects, but in all, even the historical narratives."[65] Nonetheless he often referred to "the objects which a revelation of God's will was intended to serve", which were to make men wise unto salvation.[66] This does not mean that the Bible errs on matters of scientific or historical interest, nor does it tell us exactly when the Bible is speaking scientifically or historically and when it is not, but it reiterates the general principle that the Bible must be appreciated first and foremost as a revelation of the mind and will of God, not as a textbook on geology or astronomy.

Charles Hodge, the leading American exponent of a high view of Scripture, declared in liaison with his friend Cunningham that the doctrine of verbal inspiration asserts that the sacred writers "were fully inspired as to all that they teach, whether of doctrine or fact."[67] He covered his remark, however, by a surprising, because temptingly unguarded, qualification.

> This of course does not imply that the sacred writers were infallible except for the special purpose for which they were employed. They were not imbued with plenary knowledge. As to all matters of science, philosophy, and history, they stood on the same level with their contemporaries. They were infallible only as teachers, and when acting as the spokesmen of God. Their inspiration no more made them astronomers than it made them agriculturists. Isaiah was infallible in his predictions, although he shared with his countrymen the views then prevalent as to the mechanism of the universe. Paul could not err in

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[65] Cunningham, Lectures, pp.349-350.

[66] Ibid., pp.460-461.

[67] Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, 3 volumes (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1883), vol. I, p.165.

> anything he taught, although he could not recollect how many persons he had baptised at Corinth.[68]

The language invites a whole army of invaders of the sort it was intended to repel, nonetheless its point is well taken: inerrant as the Scriptures are, their purpose is special and limited.

The attempt to square the doctrine of verbal inspiration with its alleged scientific and historical inaccuracies lights up very dramatically the problems involved in qualifying what is a seemingly unqualifiable doctrine. Modern scientific and historical investigation required, apparently, a kind of flexibility in the defence of the doctrine that the doctrine itself only reluctantly and never very convincingly allowed.

b. Errors: Original Manuscripts Or Copies

Another defensive tactic employed by the traditionalists was to distinguish between the inerrant original manuscripts and their faulty copies. If the Bible could be shown to contain errors, the errors, it was argued, did not belong to the texts as originally given but to the transcriptions made of them. As Bannerman put it:

> Inspiration was given to secure once for all a text absolutely free from error and infallibly perfect, but not, by a supernatural intervention for thousands of years, to preserve that text from accident or corruption, such as all other books and manuscripts are liable to.[69]

For Bannerman, however, this was in no way fatal to the Bible's authenticity. The increase in the number of various readings

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[68] Ibid. This whole section, "The Inspiration of the Scriptures extends to the Words" (pp.164-166) is an excellent example of the way the doctrine of verbal inspiration could be stated in the strongest possible language and at the same time be qualified in what seems an extraordinarily liberal manner.

[69] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.516.

occasioned by the demand for copies of what was believed to be the word of God brought with it a corresponding urgent and frequent appeal to the original text; so that the very possibility for error was more than compensated for by a kind of built-in correction factor.[70]

Cunningham's argument is fundamentally the same but slightly more complicated. We have, he believed, the words of Scripture preserved in their original integrity even though we do not have all of them anywhere in any single manuscript or edition. Commenting on Chapter I, Section 8 of the Confession, he said:

> Some of the opponents of the verbal inspiration of Scripture have argued that if God inspired the words he would also have exercised a minute superintendence over the transcription of every copy, so as to preserve accurately and certainly the precise words originally employed. We admit that no such superintendence was exercised over the transcription of the copies of the Scriptures. . . . We cannot lay our hands upon anything which God ever did for preserving his word and securing its integrity and purity that can be properly called miraculous in the ordinary meaning of the word.[71]

Nonetheless, he added, when we consider the dangers of destruction or corruption to which the Bible has been exposed, first from Pagan, then from Papal Rome, "these two great enemies of God and his cause", we cannot but ascribe it to "the singular, though not miraculous" providence of God that His word "has always existed and still exists in the original languages in a state of purity."[72]

Cunningham's admission that we have no assurance whatever that any transcription is inerrant, followed by his declaration that we have the word of God in its original purity, seems at first a puzzling if not

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[70] Ibid., pp.514-515.

[71] Cunningham, Lectures, pp.526-527.

[72] Ibid.

contradictory juxtaposition of ideas. But what Cunningham meant is that somewhere, though obviously not in any single manuscript in our possession, the words of Scripture as inspired by God in the first instance, exist. It is the job of scholarship to find them. So much more important for Cunningham then is the job of the textual critic.

> And it is to be observed that the position that the word of God has been kept pure in all ages does not necessarily imply that it has existed in purity in any one particular MS., or that it now exists in any one particular printed edition, but merely that God has preserved it in purity in his church, and has given to men sufficient materials, in due use of ordinary means, for obtaining a substantially accurate record of what he has revealed.[73]

Apart from the difficulty of talking at the same time about the word of God in the purity of its original languages and a (merely) substantially accurate record of what God has revealed, it is fairly clear what Cunningham was wanting to say: the inspired text is the final court of appeal and men are obligated therefore not only to apply to no other, but to make every effort to assure that, as Black put it, "the inspired text should be brought to a state of the highest possible correctness and purity." Cunningham even suggested that it was the duty of everyone who can to learn Hebrew and Greek.[74] In Cunningham then there is the conviction both that the original languages have always existed and still exist in their given purity and that it is necessary to continually seek that purity beyond the multitude of more of less imperfect texts we have in our possession at the moment.

But Cunningham apparently had misgivings about "lower" criticism as well as "higher" criticism. The mere settlement of the text, "the

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[73] Ibid., p.533.

[74] Ibid., p.537.

decision of all questions about the reading for the purpose of exhibiting the sacred text as nearly as possible as it came from the hands of its original authors", as he described the "lower", was for him important, but only insofar as it paved the way for interpretation. What mattered was "the investigation of the sense and meaning" of Scripture's statements, that is, hermeneutics or exegesis.[75] His belief that every word of Scripture had been given by God should not be taken, then, as an ultimate concern even for the purity of the text. A lot of the work done in trying to ascertain it, he felt, was insignificant.[76] Although he believed it was "necessary and imperative that ministers should acquire some knowledge of the leading points involved in it", he also believed that the subject was "not one of very great practical importance, so far as concerns the actual discovery of the mind and will of God from his word."[77] It must be said, however, that a distinction between the original manuscript which was immediately superintended by God and the copies which were not, was for Bannerman and Cunningham, as well as Black and others, a primary solution to the problem of how the Bible which plainly declared its own inspiration and authority could contain the errors which its critics were continually alleging.

c. Interpretation: The Words Or Beyond The Words?

Much as Cunningham and Bannerman may have agreed on the matter of inerrant originals and errant copies, their agreement serves to

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[75] Ibid., p.545.

[76] He cited Griesbach's Greek Testament. Although he believed it superior to the Textus Receptus, he considered it overdone. Ibid., p.549.

[77] Cunningham, Lectures, p.550.

highlight a more fundamental disagreement. The urgency which Cunningham felt to bring the inspired text to a state of the highest possible correctness and purity was due in no small measure to his conviction that the mind and will of God are to be found in the words of God and nowhere else. Bannerman on the other hand, even while arguing against objections to plenary inspiration based on imperfections in the text, maintained that "the thoughts of God in the revelation which He has granted, are not to be identified with the mere expressions in Hebrew and Greek which convey them to our ears, as if they could not be conveyed otherwise."[78]

There need be no necessary disagreement between them on this point, of course. Cunningham may have been saying only that whatever God's mind, all He has given us are His words, and the words, therefore, are that to which we must always go; and Bannerman, for his part, may have been saying only that while we have God's words and nothing more, we can be fairly confident that mere language cannot reveal all God's mind. The difference between them may be simply one of emphasis.

The difference, however, is more profound than that. Cunningham stressed the verbal nature of inspiration. His frequent use of the complete phrase "verbal plenary inspiration" is conspicuous and distinguishes him from his allies. "God has given us no certain means of knowing his will but from his word", he declared in a passage cited earlier, "and no certain means of knowing the meaning of his word, but from an investigation of the actual statements which it contains."[79] Whatever else we may do in preparing to expound the Scriptures we must always come back to the actual words of Scripture: "There is nothing above or beyond them, there is nothing beside or apart from

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[78] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.520.

[79] Cunningham, Lectures, p.582.

them, that conveys to us authentically or authoritatively the will of God for our salvation. The written word must be at once our starting point and our goal; . . ."[80] This was not Bannerman's view.

> There are divine ideas and truths underlying the surface of Scripture language, and really contained in its statements, which are not expressly or directly stated; but which are a part of the mind of God as much as any that are formally and articulately uttered. What is stated in the shape of formal affirmation is little, compared with what is involved and implied in the words, without being expressly affirmed. Scripture inferences, rightly drawn from Scripture, are as much a part of revelation as its express letter. What is contained in the Word of God under the form of implied truth, is, no less than the words themselves, a fruit of inspired wisdom.[81]

Far from asserting simply that while the mind of God is infinitely deeper than the expression we have of it in the written word (although the written word is all that God has seen fit to give us), Bannerman was actually proclaiming that if we are truly to know God's mind we must somehow get inside or beyond or below the naked text.

> Far under the surface of its language there is a well of truth springing up unto everlasting life; and it needs but that we should draw from its depths, to learn that it is divine and unfathomable. The letter of the Scripture page, even though inspired by God, is not so deep as the mind of God that is beneath it.[82]

Whereas Cunningham asserted that the Scriptures have but one sense and that that one sense can be discovered only by investigating the literal and grammatical meaning of Scripture's words exactly as they stand,[83] Bannerman declared that "To rest contented with the words of inspired men, neglecting the fuller meaning beneath, or to require that, for every truth we receive as God's truth, we should show proof

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[80] Ibid.

[81] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.583.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Cunningham, Lectures, p.587.

that it is set down expressly in so many terms in Scripture, is a practice condemned by many instances in the Word of God."[84] And in a really very remarkable passage Bannerman even suggested that our Lord and His apostles, by their example, both warrant and require us, in interpreting the Scripture, "to go beyond the outward letter, and to seek the manifold and deeper truths that are to be educed from it by good and necessary consequence."[85] He gave as an illustration Christ's deducing the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead from the name given to Jehovah at the bush.[86] The inference Christ drew, Bannerman said, though it was "very far indeed from being expressly asserted in the language from which it was taught" and "could be brought out of the language only be a process of reasoning not be any means obvious or immediate", was yet an inference "put upon the same level of authority and held to be as much a point of the revelation of divine truth, as the name of Jehovah expressly set down in the written Word; . . ."[87] We therefore, following Christ and the apostles, are authorised in doing the same thing, for in their example we recognise the duty "of drawing from the inspired volume truths that are not expressly, but only by implication, contained in its statements, and of putting these Scripture consequences on the same level with Scripture itself."[88] It is an astonishing mandate given by one whose primary purpose was to defend the very highest views of Scripture. Bannerman,

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[84] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.586.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid. This is apparently a reference to Mark 12.26f. (Exodus 3.14).

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid., pp.586-587.

however, thought the justification for it was obvious.

> If the Bible be the divine record of divine truth, it must contain within it a wisdom wider and deeper than its words; and the deductions of doctrine made from its statements on a comparison between them, if truly drawn, are as much part of God's meaning and of His revelation, - being indeed virtually contained in it, - as these statements themselves.[89]

Bannerman was setting the deduction from the Scripture text on a plane with the text itself. It is not the sort of thing one imagines Cunningham doing, with or without the qualifier, "if truly drawn."

d. Revelation: Words Or Events?

Behind Bannerman's contention that God's thoughts are not to be identified with "mere expressions in Hebrew and Greek" undoubtedly stands the more formidable but not unrelated conviction that in the first instance history and not language was the primary method of God's self-disclosure. "The lessons that God has taught in His revelation were first written on the outward pages of history", he declared, "and only afterwards written in the words and with the commentary and explanations of the Bible."[90] Christianity for Bannerman was "less a system of spiritual truths presented in abstract form, than a series of facts and examples exhibiting the manner in which God deals with the sin that he hates and provides for the recovery of the sinner whom he pities."[91] Earlier on he had put it even more emphatically: "It is God's method to reveal himself by facts rather than by propositions: and in these supernatural events which have been wrought on the earth,

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[89] Ibid., p.587.

[90] Ibid., p.27.

[91] Ibid., p.25.

and recorded in the Bible, there is a spiritual meaning as deep and true as is found even in the words."[92] The sacred writers he referred to as "the historians of revelation"[93] and, in his view, the historicity of Scripture precedes the fact that the Bible is inspired, rather than the other way around. "So thoroughly is revelation identified with Bible history", he claimed, "that if the Bible be not historically true, it is a matter of no consequence whether it be inspired or not."[94] God, for Bannerman, had spoken first in history, not in words.

The implications of this are far reaching, of course: grasping or apprehending the meaning of an historical event, even if it has been mediated through a divinely inspired document, is a fundamentally different process from understanding the meaning of words, just as seeing beyond the words involves a different mode of perception from that required for reading, even rightly reading, the words themselves. The difference between Cunningham and Bannerman constitutes nothing less than a difference over the nature of revelation and therefore of Christian belief and understanding.

The older position was not monolithic. There can be no question as to its essential character, but the very variety of its defence suggests that it was not at all free from ambiguities and differences of opinion upon the resolution of some of which, as the case of Bannerman perhaps best illustrates, fairly important issues hang.

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[92] Ibid., p.14.

[93] Ibid., p.101.

[94] Ibid., p.31.

Bannerman's "Retreat"

Bannerman's almost six hundred pages in defence of plenary inspiration is an interesting study. The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, while it did not hesitate to take serious issue with the book on several counts, nonetheless maintained that it "contains incomparably the most systematic and complete discussion of the great question of the inspiration of Holy Scripture which has yet been presented to the Christian Church."[95] The liberal American journal Bibliotheca Sacra, on the other hand, while it acknowledged that the book "defends the more rigid doctrine of inspiration", also pointed out that "Dr. Bannerman is not, however, an advocate of the theory of verbal inspiration, . . ."[96] A. B. Davidson remarked that the book "seems to have called forth no opposition and no assent",[97] yet it was quoted in support on both sides of the inspiration debate.[98]

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[95] The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol XIV, 1865, p.434.

[96] Bibliotheca Sacra, vol. XXII (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1865), pp.351-352. For other reviews see The Reformed Presbyterian Magazine and The Christian Treasury for 1865.

[97] James Strahan, Andrew Bruce Davidson, p.105.

[98] J. S. Candlish, for instance, quoted it in support of his contention that "it is known that more than one of the older records from which the Old Testament historical books were compiled were poetical, being collections of songs and hymns; and sometimes extracts from these seem to have been embodied in the later prose narrative, without any obvious distinction." "The Authority of Scripture Independent of Criticism" (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1877), pp.7-9, in reference to Bannerman Inspiration, pp.534-536. John Montgomery in turn attacked Candlish for misusing Bannerman. "Dr. Bannerman, indeed, admits the possibility that the theory of an extensive use of previously existing documents by the inspired historians may be maintained consistently with the doctrine of plenary inspiration; but he expresses himself in a way which indicates no favourable estimation of the theory in any of the forms in which it has been set forth by the Biblical Critics who most delight in it." "Prof. Smith and His Apologists", p.17. Bannerman seemed to be available to both sides.

The same sort of ambiguity seems to attend the reading of Inspiration in our own day. Drummond and Bulloch, for instance, say that Bannerman "had begun a cautious retreat from an untenable position",[99] while a recent commentator on the Robertson Smith case has assured us to the contrary that "The regnant orthodoxy was nowhere more clearly defined than in the teaching of Dr. Bannerman under whom Smith studied apologetics", and that Bannerman's position, which Smith stood against, was that of verbal plenary inspiration and that Bannerman defended it with "very uncompromising rigour."[100]

The latter judgement, as we shall see, is clearly inaccurate and the former needs explanation, but taken together they suggest that the argument of Inspiration is worth at least a brief review, in order, if nothing else, to try to clarify it. The book, as well, may serve as a kind of period piece, an illustration of the way in which the defence of the traditional view of Scripture might be conducted in the opening years of the battle for the Bible, ten years before the publication of Robertson Smith's Britannica article.

In some ways Inspiration is as comprehensive and convincing an argument for the older view as one could want; in other ways it is hardly an argument at all.

Bannerman began by contending that unless one accepts the supernatural character of revelation there can be no discussion of inspiration.

> In approaching, then, the subject of the inspiration of the Bible, the very first idea which presents itself, is the supernatural character of the revelation which it

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[99] Drummond and Bulloch, The Church in Victorian Scotland, 1843-1874. p.263.

[100] Donald R. Nelson, "The Theological Development of the Young Robertson Smith", The Evangelical Quarterly, vol. XLV, No. 2, 1973, pp.84-86.

> contains; and without this idea implied and taken for granted as a confessed fact, it is impossible and useless to proceed with the argument.[101]

Neither can there be a discussion of the question without a preliminary assumption of the historical veracity of the authors of Scripture, that is, that as human writers they were fully trustworthy.[102] The evidence for this Bannerman also expected his readers to accept as conclusive before he moved on to the question of whether or not the Scripture writings were inspired by God.[103]

The net result of this procedure is that as soon as these two propositions are accepted, the debate for all practical purposes is over. All that is left for Bannerman to do is to get from the supernatural character of the revelation which the Bible contains to the supernatural character of the Bible itself, that is, from the supernatural character of the events of the record to the supernatural character of the record of the events. Bannerman did this easily enough by arguing that in almost every case objections to the inspiration of Scripture are really objections to difficulties "either inherent in the supernatural revelation contained in it, or to be charged against the writings if possessed of historical veracity." So to those who accept both the supernatural revelation contained in Scripture and its historical veracity the argument comes to this: "whether difficulties perfectly consistent with a divine revelation and with human veracity are yet perfectly inconsistent with the doctrine of a plenary inspiration."[104]

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[101] Bannerman, Inspiration, p.16.

[102] Ibid., pp.18ff.

[103] Ibid., p.18.

[104] Ibid., p.210.

> The vast majority of the most important of the objections urged against inspiration are really not peculiar to it at all; and the man who, in the proper extent of the word, recognises in the Bible a supernatural revelation from God, although contained only in a veracious human record, has already mastered the main difficulties which stand in the way of his admission of inspiration.[105]

The remainder of Bannerman's argument on this score is less a logical deduction than a common sense judgement: since an altogether supernatural revelation from God, recorded by the most scrupulous and honest of men, still leaves a great deal of room for errors of judgement, expression and memory, it follows that if men are to have anything more than a merely human record of what merely human writers thought was the mind of God, "there must have been, in the case of an infallible Scripture, a supernatural inspiration from God, enabling the prophet unerringly and without failure to transfer the revelation given him, and in the purity and integrity in which it was given him, to the permanent page; . . ."[106]

Having thus established the fact of inspiration, Bannerman is in a position to wheel into action his most effective, if not his sole weapon in Scripture's defence, which is to assert, in reply to every attack on its integrity, that as a human book it has a right to every leniency granted to any book written by honest men, but as a divine book it must be afforded the privileges of a book written by inspired men. If they were inspired only partially, however, the door is left wide open for error without definable limit and we have no rule for interpretation.[107] The formula "fully human yet fully divine" therefore

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[105] Ibid., pp.210-211.

[106] Ibid., p.214.

[107] Ibid., p.567.

nicely covers every contingency.

> The union of the divine and human element, in all the integrity and perfection of each, in every portion of Scripture, guarantees the exclusion from the authorship of the sacred writers of every error and imperfection that could belong to it as man's, and the possession of all the truth and infallibility that must appertain to it as God's. Whatever methods or principles of interpretation are applicable to human writings, must be applicable to Scripture, because it is a human writing; with this exception, that they must recognise the fact that it is not only human, but also divine.[108]

Bannerman applied the same sort of logic to the problem of unity and diversity in Scripture: it is a varied book but still it is one; and in this too it is like, but infinitely unlike, every other book.

> If a supernatural inspiration is confessed in all Scripture, - if above the human authorship so diversified and different, there be acknowledged a divine authorship, which never varies in respect of the one system of truth which it was the object of Scripture from beginning to end to reveal, - there will be no difficulty in recognising that higher unity that binds into one and harmonises the human diversities which mark the Scripture writings.[109]

Likewise prophecy. The prophets wrote in and for their own time and place. They had to to be understood. Besides they were only men. But God's foresight must be taken into account as well: while the prophets probably did not understand the full import of their own message, God did, and the future revealed it.[110]

Bannerman's method was simply to assert over and over again that the Bible is both human and divine, as fully the production of God as it is the production of finite but honest human beings. To both factors in the equation he asked our assent from the beginning and to both factors he appealed at every turn in the argument. But again this is hardly a real argument, The conclusion is implicit in the premise.

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[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid., p.570.

[110] Ibid., pp.573-575.

Where it is an argument in any important sense it is an argument against doctrines of partial inspiration, and that is what Bannerman is primarily about. To those who denied the supernatural element in revelation altogether, he had nothing to say.[111] But to those who admitted the supernatural in revelation and yet attempted to explain inspiration as partial or in some sense less than plenary, his point was this: such doctrines go beyond what the Bible itself allows and in no way help explain difficulties which a doctrine of plenary inspiration does not explain better. They do not simplify, but only complicate; moreover they are fully comprehended in a doctrine of plenary inspiration. And insofar as they stress the inspiration of the writers rather than of the writings, they depend upon a kind of subjectivism which undermines the objective other-ness required of a supernatural word of God from beyond ourselves. Such doctrines, in a word, are un-biblical and subjectivist. Bannerman was contending, not so much with those who attacked Scripture on critical or rationalist grounds as with those who defended it on subjectivist grounds. He was arguing for a thoroughly biblical faith supported by a completely objective word of God.

Drummond and Bulloch's judgement that Bannerman "had begun a cautious retreat from an untenable position", while it properly points to a treasonable tendency in Bannerman's argument, is not altogether accurate. It suggests that Bannerman had quite consciously begun to desert the older and higher view. Plainly he had not. Everywhere and always and in the most uncompromising language he argued that the Bible was free from all errors of conception, reasoning, memory, and

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[111] Ibid., p.16.

expression, and throughout gave evidence of its divine authorship.[112] There is, admittedly, a treasonable tendency, but it is better described by the review already cited: Bannerman defended the more rigid doctrine of inspiration, but he was not an advocate of the theory of verbal inspiration - the theory, that is, "that human language was the medium through which the Holy Spirit both revealed truth to the prophet, and empowered him to speak with infallible accuracy."[113] What Bannerman disavowed was not the inspiration of the Bible's language - along with his colleagues he affirmed that God's revelation had been supernaturally transferred to human language[114] - but rather attempts to describe the method by which God inspired the sacred writers. What he said was this:

> Although instances can be pointed out in which it were difficult to deny, in consistency with any fair system of interpretation, that Scripture warrants the idea of verbal revelation, yet it would be equally difficult to prove that in all cases words were the medium of communication. In the matter of inspiration (not revelation), the proof that it was carried on through the instrumentality of language is still less decisive, and with respect to both, it would be to limit the power of God in a manner both unwarranted and presumptuous, to imagine or assert that He cannot employ other instrumentality to effect the end in view.[115]

Bannerman maintained that "the connection between human thought and language is not of that invariable or essential kind to justify us in saying that there can be no avenue to the mind except through

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[112] Ibid., pp.568ff.

[113] Bibliotheca Sacra, vol. XXII, 1865, pp.351-352. Bibliotheca Sacra was perceptive enough to see that the doctrine of verbal inspiration that Bannerman rejected was the doctrine (re-)defined in this particular way.

[114] Bannerman, Inspiration, pp.149ff.

[115] Ibid., p.247.

words, and no means by which its ideas may be guided to the infallible expression of them except a verbal inspiration."[116] God may have sometimes revealed Himself in audible speech, to the prophets for instance, but the fact that the recording of that revelation was verbally inspired cannot be proved. Had God chosen, Bannerman argued, He could have used other means to effect His communication and it might be different from what it is. To affirm anything else is to limit God and to affirm too much. He concluded in a less than dogmatic fashion:

> Verbal inspiration, as the method of the divine agency, is a doctrine which, if it cannot be affirmed to be false, can as little be affirmed to be true. If it does not run counter to anything found in Scripture, it is, we suspect, an explanation of the mystery which Scripture does not demand.[117]

It is difficult to see how Bannerman can have a Bible free from errors of conception and expression without a doctrine of some kind of verbal inspiration; nonetheless his intention is plain enough. He was very careful to distinguish between revelation and inspiration. He could speak freely therefore about the way he believed God had made Himself and His will known to men in the first instance (revelation) and at the same time he could refuse to venture as to how that knowledge was transferred without error to the sacred page in the second (inspiration). Some of his colleagues were not as careful and so implied that the words God suggested to the authors of Scripture in inspiring them were also the means He used to reveal Himself to them. Thus Black's "it is by words that we engage in the exercise of communion with God; . . ." etc. The ground on which Bannerman objected to talk of verbal inspiration was this: he saw it not simply as the least

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[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid., p.248.

ambiguous statement of the fact of inspiration but as a description of the method of inspiration which, as nearly all concurred, was a divine mystery and not open for discussion.[118] With his comrades then, Bannerman both agreed and disagreed.

Clearly Bannerman had dissociated himself from the theory of verbal inspiration as stated at the opening of New College. In that sense he had also "prepared the way for the full employment of Biblical Criticism by Free Church scholars."[119] But whether or not he recognised that he was doing so is the question. It could be argued that Candlish's interpretation of the creation narrative also constitutes defection. The differences between Bannerman and Cunningham, or between Bannerman and Candlish, or between Candlish and Cunningham for that matter, should not be seen as differences of opinion about the completeness or importance of Scripture and its inspiration - on that they were unanimous - but as differences in the way they worked out their opinions in its mutual defence. In other words, it is in what seem to be his almost incidental remarks, or better, in his finer destinctions, that Bannerman's ambiguities and compromises lurk. Because behind those remarks and distinctions lie ideas of the most fundamentally "critical" sort. That God first revealed Himself in history and only later in words, that God's mind is revealed only by looking beyond the sacred page - these ideas are the culprits. Their solvent effect on Bannerman's case seems hardly to have been noticed, however; indeed Bannerman himself does not seem to have noticed how they militated against his argument for an absolutely objective word of God. On the main point Bannerman did not waver and the friends of traditional

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[118] Cunningham, who often sounds very like Black, nonetheless saw the possibility of the confusion but failed to deal with it. See Lectures, pp.354ff.

[119] Drummond and Bulloch, The Church in Victorian Scotland, 1843-1874. p.264.

orthodoxy recognised that he did not. But in defending it he made assertions which in a later and fuller development from the pen of someone else might be used to undermine the very position Bannerman meant that they should uphold. The language Bannerman used in 1865, under the pressure of another ten or fifteen years' debate, could easily be pushed into other shapes and employed for other ends.

Candlish And Cunningham Reconsidered

Candlish yields to the same kind of analysis. Some of his comments are booby-trapped nearly as much as Bannerman's, and much in the same way. They need therefore only to be recorded in order to support the point made in the review of Inspiration. There are first of all Candlish's comments about the Gospels in their spontaneous simplicity being truer than an absolutely perfect history. But even more conspicuous perhaps are his remarks on the self-evidencing inspiration of Scripture. "To a mind rightly exercised upon them", he said, "and above all, to a heart influenced by the same Holy Spirit who breathes in them, the Scriptures evidence themselves to be of divine inspiration."[120] As any son simply knows that a letter is from his father, Candlish urged, so the child of God feels the divine impress of Scripture. It breathes all through, even in the geneologies of Matthew and Luke and "the dry catalogue of names in the tenth chapter of Nehemiah."[121]

> My own actual hand-writing may not be on the page: sickness, or some casualty, may have made an amanuensis necessary. But my boy knows my letter nevertheless - knows it as all my own - knows it by the instinct, the intuition of affection, and needs no other proof.[122]

To his "cold, cynical, hypercritical schoolmates" who might question what he sees of his father in "that barren itinerary with which the

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[120] Candlish, Reason and Revelation, p.40.

[121] Ibid.

[122] Ibid., p.41.

letter begins - the dry list of places he tells you he has gone through; or in that matter-of-course message about a cloak and some books with which it ends", the boy would reply:

> You may be too knowing to sympathise with me, . . . but there is enough in every line here to make me know my father's voice; and if he has been at pains to write down for my satisfaction the names of towns and cities and men - if he does give me simple notices about common things, I see nothing strange in that. I love him all the better for his kindness and condescension; and whatever you may insinuate, I will believe that this is all throughout his very letter, and that he has a gracious meaning in all that he writes to me in it, however frivolous it may seem to you.[123]

It is the language of genuine devotion and it rings true, but it is hardly an argument of the sort that Candlish ordinarily professed to require. Moreover it is precisely the sort of argument that Candlish generally opposed. The exact phrases in fact - instinct and intuition - which he condemned elsewhere, he approved here. It is true that what Candlish condemned was inspiration <u>regarded as</u> intuition and what he approved was inspiration <u>recognised by</u> intuition and that the two things must not be confused; nevertheless, even his use of such language seems somehow inconsistent. By how much may be illustrated by referring to comments he had made but twenty pages earlier in the same lecture.

In a fairly extended passage Candlish described and denounced the popular theory about the nature of revelation which had resulted from what he referred to as "the turn of modern metaphysical speculation in certain quarters." According to this theory, he said, whatever real insight we have into the being and perfections of God comes by the intuitional faculty, or intuition. Hence it is inferred that the only way in which God can reveal Himself to man is by quickening his intuitional faculty and so giving to his higher reason a new sense of

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[123] <u>Ibid</u>., pp.41-42.

things divine. On this theory the Scriptures are not oracles of God or objective communications of the divine mind; they merely awaken our own intuitional powers and "whatever divine impulse may lead us to kindle our torch at the divine fire which we see burning there so brightly."[124]

Candlish acknowledged that such a fire did burn in the Scriptures, especially in the life of Christ, and that "the sympathising student may catch the flame of it" and in this way "gain an insight into things divine, otherwise beyond his reach."[125] But this manner of speaking of revelation and inspiration, Candlish said, "this vague and perhaps sublime recognition of a certain sort of divinity in the Bible, is manifestly inconsistent with the idea of its being, in any fair meaning of the term, a revelation of the mind of God."[126]

> To call this a revelation is an abuse of language; but it is a plausible abuse, and one fitted to impose upon the unwary. The distinction between a real revelation and this spurious counterfeit adroitly substituted for it, is as broad as it is vital.[127]

There is dissonance in Candlish's case. The Bible's inspiration, he argued, must never be thought of as something primarily in us, the product merely of our own heightened instinctive or intuitional powers. And yet, how do we know it to be the word of God? - "by the instinct, the intuition of affirmation", Candlish answered, and we need no other proof.

What is perhaps most striking is how much Candlish sounds like Coleridge, precisely the one against whose general influence he was

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[124] Ibid., pp.16-17.

[125] Ibid., pp.17-18.

[126] Ibid., p.18.

[127] Ibid., p.19.

contending. Speaking of the action of the Holy Spirit on the writers of Scripture, Coleridge declared:

> If in the holy men thus actuated all imperfection of knowledge, all participation in the mistakes and limits of their several ages had been excluded, how could these writings be or become the history and example, the echo and more lustrous image of the work and warfare of the sanctifying Principle in us? - If after all this, and in spite of all this, some captious litigator should lay hold of a text here or there - St. Paul's cloak left at Troas with Carpus, or a verse from the Canticles, and ask: "of what spiritual use is this?" - the answer is ready: "It proves to us that nothing can be so trifling as not to supply an evil heart with a pretext for unbelief." [128]

This is persuasive language. But although it is expected from Coleridge and not uncongenial even when echoed by Candlish, it does not well support an argument for objective communications of the divine mind. Candlish evidenced more of mixed feeling if not theological ambiguity than perhaps he was aware of, which only serves to underscore the complicated nature of the case and the state of the argument at the time.

Cunningham, by contrast, is less ambiguous. At the same time he is less persuasive - probably because he gives less away. The same dogmatic consistency which does not allow him to lose his theological balance, which does not allow him even to seem to be speaking his opponents' sentiments or empathising with them, neither does it have the plausibility that a less consistent case might have. His case is simple and sensible: any plain man can know God's will if he will but diligently study God's word. "There they are; they are God's words. He has given them to you, that by ascertaining their meaning, you may know his will; . . ."[129] His case is rational and logical. It works

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[128] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Aids to Reflection and Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit (London: George Bell and Sons, 1893), pp.336-337. (Italics are Coleridge's.)

[129] Cunningham, Lectures, p.587.

off of the premise that if the Bible is inspired it cannot be unsystematic or its meaning vague. God's speaking must be clear speaking. If it is not, the fault is not with God.

Cunningham fits least tidily, if at all, into the thesis that the views of the Free Church Fathers embody a kind of embroyonic criticism. What he shared with the critics was a conviction that every passage in the Bible ought to be analysed with the utmost care; but he covered this with an equally firm conviction that the results of such analysis could not be inconsistent with "the general scheme of truth taught in the Bible."[130] He was unequivocally opposed to criticism as he understood it. He described it as carried on by German writers, "some of whom have brought to this work a large amount of learning, accompanied generally with a miserable lack of common sense and sound logic."[131] And in what he labelled "the thorough and daring infidelity of German rationalists", he nearly paraphrased the views for which George Adam Smith was impeached less than sixty years later:

> It is a favourite idea of the German rationalists, and is another specimen of their infidelity, that the system of doctrine which is contained in the Bible is capable of progressive and indefinite improvement; that as it stands in the Bible it is mixed up with many crude and ill-digested notions, such as might be expected to proceed from men who lived in a comparatively rude and uncultivated age, but that, with the march of intellect and the progress of literature and science, men may be expected to be better able to separate the chaff from the wheat, to throw off what savours of an uncultivated age and is traceable merely to local or temporary influences, and to bring out fully from the Scriptures a system of pure and rational Christianity. [132]

The Theological Lectures were delivered in 1843 but were not published until seventeen years after Cunningham's death in 1861.

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[130] Ibid., pp.596-597.

[131] Ibid., p.422.

[132] Ibid., p.253.

Thomas Smith, their editor, thought it necessary, therefore, to justify their issue in the light of the changes in theology that had taken place in the interval. "It is quite true that if Dr. Cunningham had been alive now, and had been writing on the same subjects, his manner of treating them would have been somewhat different from that in which he treated them five-and-thirty years ago."[133] The justification, one senses, was partly an expression of regret that the lectures were being published at all, a regret that A. B. Bruce, though "with respect amounting to veneration for an old teacher", did not fail to express very frankly indeed.[134]

Smith's comment is worth pondering nonetheless, especially in regard to the debate over inspiration. Smith did not speculate on how the Lectures might have been modified, but it is difficult to imagine Cunningham's view of Scripture being very much altered by the scholarship of the thirty-five years between their delivery and their publication. It seems more likely that had he lived Cunningham would have been found as near the front of traditionalist ranks in 1878 as he was in 1843. His is perhaps the tightest defence of inspiration of any of the Free Church Fathers.

As it stands however Cunningham's case does not breath. But those that do are vulnerable precisely because they do. They never argue

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[133] Ibid., p. vii.

[134] "Whether this work should ever have been published may be a matter of question, but certain it is, it should have been published long ago, or not at all. We presume it owes its appearance to supposed bearings on present controversies within the church of which the author was a distinguished ornament - a motive for publication with which the outside world have no concern, and which to many within the pale may appear to degrade the work into the position of a controversial pamphlet." The British and Foreign Evangelical Review, vol. XXVIII, 1878, pp.489-490. The "present controversies" to which Bruce referred was of course the Robertson Smith Case.

for anything less than a fully inspired Scripture, but in their attempt to come to terms with the humanity of the divine word they tend to underline the ambiguities and inconsistencies implicit in the mystery itself - or they make an appeal to a kind of subjectivism that is also, uncongenial as it may be to their case in its fullest expression, an undeniable and unavoidable characteristic of all religion nonetheless. In a sense, the further they go into the inevitable paradoxes, even in the most strident attempt to make one side serve the other, the further they open up or even undermine their own position. It is the nature of the case. To defend it at all is necessarily to give the status of real problems to problems which, in the absence of a requirement for defence, might be considered mere discrepancies. It is also to offer solutions, which in the testing of them that would inevitably follow, might lead to even further problems, either by their inadequacy or in the wider issues they imply.

Conclusion

If the various styles of Christian piety could be ordered on a kind of graph or spectrum, with objective/rational at one end and subjective/experimental at the other, there can be little difficulty in deciding on which side of centre to plot mid-nineteenth century Scottish Evangelicalism. The word Calvinism suggests theology nearly as much as it does a particular type of theology, and Cunningham's "Calvinism of the Word of God" characterises a mood or an ethos as aptly as it does a system or a method. The tone is decidedly doctrinal and cognitive as opposed to mystical and intuitive.[135]

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[135]This may be an important difference between Scottish and English Evangelicalism. The Evangelical movement in England, according to John Baillie, "had its own contribution to make towards the emergence of the romantic temper in that country." The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p.12.

The study of church history, to Cunningham's mind, was most serviceable as an apologetic tool. In teaching it, he told the General Assembly of 1845, he intended, first, to "give an historical exhibition of the various deviations which, in the course of eighteen centuries, had occurred from the truth laid down in the Holy Scriptures", and second, to "give a detailed view of the leading controversies which from time to time have agitated men's minds, and which have exerted the greatest influence on belief and doctrine."[136] According to Rainy, Cunningham's pupil, successor, and biographer, the course bore the marks of Cunningham's intent: "The charm of historic detail was necessarily sacrificed; the cross lights from human nature and experience faded away; the course became severe, and depended wholly on one great interest as its motive and justification."[137] Cunningham's method, Rainy said, was not merely to narrate a series of historical events, or even to explain how any one of them came to prominence: "It presses on at once to the practical and ultimate question in which the theologian is interested, viz., What is true?"[138]

Cunningham's failure to distinguish between history and apologetics was due not so much to any confusion between them as to a more fundamental conviction about what truth is and how it is arrived at. It was reported to Cunningham that his appointment to the History post had been opposed by some on the ground that he had no imagination. His response: "Don't you think a want of imagination is rather a good feature in a historian?"[139] Truth, historical or theological, was not the yield

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[136] As quoted in Robert Rainy, Life of William Cunningham, D.D. (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1871), pp.226-227.

[137] Ibid., p.229.

[138] Ibid. It should also be kept in mind that Cunningham came to Church History from Apologetics.

[139] Ibid., p.225.

of imaginative but rather of rational processes and Church History was handmaid to Systematic Theology. The same unspeculating insistence on dogmatic certainty and consistency had earlier governed Cunningham's handling of Scripture and the doctrine of inspiration. Severely technical as his method was it was never fully critical. It was not allowed to breach or even to test the boundaries of his theological

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system.

Candlish encouraged more daring. "The advocates of inspiration, - even of verbal inspiration -", he declared in his examination of F. D. Maurice's Essays, "have no objection whatever to cast the Bible unreservedly into the crucible of exegetical and antiquarian analysis; and they are not careful though the result should be, along with the explanation of many old puzzles, the raising of some new ones."[141] But Candlish may be the best illustration of the evils that beset those who attempt, seriously and more or less fearlessly, to be open in intellectually unsettled times. His appreciation for science, modified by his aptitude for dogma, sometimes produced answers to questions about inspiration that, rather than preclude further inquiry, tend to invite it. As for imagination, it is precisely in Candlish's occasional reliance on it - often the most winsome though not the most cogent

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[140] To do him justice, Cunningham was never merely rational. Although his approach to the Bible and Christian belief is almost always expressed in terms that are more cerebral than those of the other protagonists, he insisted as much as any of them that no effective knowledge of God's word could be had without the aid of the Holy Spirit and that the essential thing about any view of inspiration is that it should lead those who hold it to submit themselves to Scripture's authority. See Lectures, pp.559 and 407-408.

[141] Robert S. Candlish, Examination of Mr. Maurice's Theological Essays (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1845), p.386.

sections of his argument - that he loses his way and comes nearest the subjectivism he eschews but cannot avoid.

Even the attempt to say no more in Scripture's behalf than the Scriptures themselves say was not without its complications. That Bannerman's 588 pages should be considered both a defence of the more rigid doctrine of inspiration and a preparation for higher criticism is perhaps the evidence. No one could mistake the intention of Bannerman's book; not everyone was able to see its implications. And in Bannerman too, perhaps as much as in Candlish, there are sporadic outbreaks of the intuitive or experiential, the activity of a kind of spiritual fifth column, never to be completely subdued in even the most rationally inclined of religious men and debate.

The encounter with what Candlish pejoratively referred to as "theological science" drew out the doctrine of plenary inspiration, stretched it and thinned it as it forced it to come to terms with itself, thus exposing its weaknesses as well as demonstrating its strengths. More precisely, it was perhaps not the doctrine but the defence of the doctrine which was tested; and in the process the doctrine itself was sometimes transmuted. Again Bannerman is the primary case in point: he felt, apparently, that he had to jettison verbal inspiration in order to save plenary inspiration, which meant giving the traditional position a different character altogether.[142]

There were only a few tactical options open to the traditionalists. One was simply to repudiate the hostile forces, to argue that the battle was preeminently spiritual, that the truth could be seen only

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[142] "And this, indeed, is the peculiar character of the doctrine, that you cannot diminish or qualify but you reverse it." Coleridge, Aids to Reflection and the Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit, p.318.

by the eye of faith and probably not in this life. The other was to engage them, to contest every issue on its own ground, answering blow for blow, and sometimes allowing its position to be vulnerable or even modified in order to secure its defence. The traditionalists took both options. Their spirituality required that they take the first, their rationality required that they take the second. But insofar as they took the second they admitted that criticism was with them, if only as an evil to be checked. In other words they joined the battle. Perhaps neither their faith nor their theology would allow them to do otherwise. But the defence of the doctrine of inspiration proved to be, itself, a double-edged sword. Believing may have fostered believing criticism.

CONCLUSION

The main contention of this study has been two-fold: first, that the change in attitudes to the Bible in Scotland in the last half of the nineteenth century was concerned more with the meaning of faith than matters of criticism; second, that the change was not so much a revolution as a transition, and traces of the new may be found in the old. The debate was not primarily over the doctrine of inspiration. Insofar as it was an affair of doctrine it was about the doctrine of revelation rather than inspiration, or better perhaps, the doctrine of Scripture. But more important than questions of inspiration or revelation was the problem of what it means to believe. What was at stake was the nature of the relationship between God and man.

The believing critics made significant contributions to our understanding of the Bible, not the least of which was an appreciation of it as great literature. They demonstrated how the Bible could be read with edification on its own and for its own sake; indeed they insisted that it must be read in this way before it could be properly put to any other use. They very forcefully reminded their Church of how the Bible could be practically neglected in the interests of an allegedly biblical theology. Not that they deprecated theology, but they effectively argued that it was not the first thing, and that when it was done it had to be done from the "right end", in full awareness of the historical, progressive, and sometimes wonderfully artistic nature of biblical revelation.

Where the believing critics fell short was in getting their faith and their criticism together, more particularly in their seeming failure to recognise that theology might serve as mediator between

the two. William Robertson Smith leaves one with the impression that his faith was one thing and his criticism another, that there was in him both believer and critic but that the two had very little to do with one another. This contributes to the impression that he did not take the Bible's history seriously, BELIEVING that inasmuch as what mattered in the Old Testament was the fact of a personal relationship between God and His people, the (mere) record of that relationship might be criticised almost without limit, with little damage to what he called its simple heart-felt message.

A. B. Davidson is slightly different. Of the great trio he was the best theologian and most sophisticated thinker. He was aware that criticism and faith could not be dissociated. But neither he nor Robertson Smith dealt adequately with the relationship between biblical history, so much the object of criticism, and present experience. Nor, in their very proper stress on the personal nature of faith, did they leave enough room for the propositional.

Their failure at this point raises the question why it was easier to unite criticism and belief when dealing with the Old Testament than when dealing with the New. Experience of the Christ who is found in the New Testament provides the fulcrum for the criticism of the Old Testament, but what if the critical guns were turned on the New? Davidson's innate caution and thoroughly biblical method seems to have preserved him from inconsistency in his treatment of the two Testaments. Neither his break with older formulations nor his acceptance of newer ones was as radical as Robertson Smith's; so while it was often difficult to know exactly where he stood on particular issues, it was always clear that he was aware that the issues were profound, and that even if he had not answered the questions he knew well enough what they were.

Ironically it was George Adam Smith,by all accounts the least theological of the three, who came closest to a kind of consistency between his faith and his criticism. It is not so much that he had worked out the theological inter-connections as that his view of the Bible and his view of faith seemed to require less conciliation. The Bible for Smith was a record of how a people gradually left behind their primitive barbarity until it reached the moral insights and example of the prophets and finally that of Christ Himself. How the teaching of the Old Testament, especially in its laws and its rites, was related to present faith was not a problem for him, since he did not believe there was any relation, except insofar as the latter meant a rejection of the former. But to say that George Adam Smith was consistent in the working out of the relation between his faith and his criticism is not necessarily to say that his construction overall is a sound one. It may be simply to say that he had failed to read the Old Testament's message rightly, or the New Testament's, and thus had failed fully to appreciate the questions implied in the relationship between the two and the criticism of either, as was best illustrated perhaps in his treatment of sacrifice and the death of Christ.

All the same, believing critic is a good description of George Adam Smith, as it is of William Robertson Smith and A. B. Davidson; and the best reasons for saying so are to be found in their preaching. George Adam Smith was a preacher first and a scholar second, by his own admission a modernizer and an interpreter whose primary interest was not in criticism but in the way in which criticism affected men's understanding of the Bible's message.

Something similar is true of A. B. Davidson. That he was a great preacher is not so important as that he believed that preaching and teaching were the same thing, that "the occupant of a Chair will be successful just so far as he makes his Chair a pulpit and preaches from it." Criticism was but a means. Faith was the end.

William Robertson Smith was certainly not a preacher first and foremost, nor is there any evidence that he believed in the unity of teaching and preaching. But if there was a dichotomy in him between the two, that dichotomy is noticeable primarily because his sermons are so simple and devotional, so "old-fashioned" and "evangelical."

None of the believing critics preached "critically" in fact, which illustrates to some extent both the importance they placed on faith, the faith of the average man, and the apparent lack of its relation to their criticism.

But the last half of the nineteenth century was an extraordinary time. No one could have seen clearly how old faith and new science were related, or even if, as Davidson himself wondered, they were related. The problems are with us still. Moreover it was the argument of the final chapter that between old and new there was a continuity as well as a confrontation, that in the language of some of the older writers there were views implied that were themselves untraditional, even when expressed in defence of the traditional position. Almost as soon as Candlish or Bannerman turned their attention to the question of the nature and function of Scripture, or more, to that of how scriptural truth is apprehended, they began to use language very like that of the believing critics. But such is the nature of the thing. The Bible, even as Cunningham pointed out, is human as well as divine, and living faith involves experience as well as assent to doctrine, heart as well as head.

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